

**A COMMUNITY OF PRESTIGE:  
A SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE COSMOPOLITAN ELITE  
CLASS IN COLONIAL SINGAPORE**

**ERIK HOLMBERG**

**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF  
SINGAPORE**

**2009**

**A COMMUNITY OF PRESTIGE:  
A SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE COSMOPOLITAN ELITE  
CLASS IN COLONIAL SINGAPORE**

**ERIK HOLMBERG**  
*(M.A.), NUS*

**A THESIS SUBMITTED  
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF  
PHILOSOPHY  
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY  
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE**

**2009**

## **Acknowledgements**

I am very grateful to the many people who helped me over the years while I was working on my doctoral dissertation. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my very patient doctoral supervisor, Professor Tan Tai Yong; to my thesis committee members, A/P Gregory K. Clancey and A/P Maurizio Peleggi (each of whom kindly read drafts of my dissertation); and to the National University of Singapore for providing me with a research scholarship. In addition, I would like to thank A/P Yong Mun Cheong for his kindness in reading drafts of my dissertation. I am grateful to my thesis examiners, A/P Ernest C.T. Chew, A/P John Miksic, and Professor Anthony Milner, for their valuable feedback, and to Dr. Julian Davison, A/P Brian P. Farrell, A/P Stephen L. Keck, A/P Albert Lau, A/P Edwin Lee, Dr. Ivan Polunin, Professor Peter Reeves, Dr. K.G. Tregonning, Dr. Geoffrey Wade, and Professor James Francis Warren for their encouragement and assistance over the years. I am very grateful to my fellow graduate students who enriched my experience at NUS in various ways over the years, including Clement Liew, James Low, Ten Leu-Jiun, Dr. Loh Kah Seng, Haydon Cherry, Dr. Diego Musitelli, Leander Seah, Seah Bee Leng, Glenn Ang, Kelvin Koh, Ong Zhen Min, Didi Kwartanada, Dr. Chua Ai Lin, Dr. Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied, Dr. Yasuko Kobayashi, Dr. Deepa Nair, and Dr. Fang Xiaoping. Simon Monteiro kindly gave me access to his extensive collection of historical documents relating to colonial Singapore. The staff members of the NUS History Department General Office (Letha Kumar, Jasmine Sim, Normah Osman, Harlizah Abd Hamid, and Diana Haron) were very helpful, as were Susan Khoo and Daisy Seah of the FASS Dean's Office, Sharon Cheong of the Registrar's Office, and the staff members of the NUS Central Library. I would especially like to thank Senior Librarian Tim Yap Fuan for all of his help. Finally, I would like to thank my parents for their steadfast support and encouragement through the years.



## **Table of Contents**

*Acknowledgements*

p. i

*Table of Contents*

p. iii

*Summary*

pp. v-vi

*Introduction*

A System of Status Symbols Shared by Asian and European Elites

pp. 1-34

*Chapter One*

Asian Colonial Elites and Empire-Building

pp. 35-144

*Chapter Two*

Concepts and Approaches:

Public Pageantry, Rituals, Icons, and Conspicuous Recreation

pp. 145-211

*Chapter Three*

A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?

pp. 213-295

*Chapter Four*

The Cult of Raffles:

Civil Religion and the Multiracial Elite Class in Colonial Singapore

pp. 297-385

*Chapter Five*

Imperial Monarchy and the Theatre of Prestige in Colonial Singapore

pp. 387-469

*Conclusions and Implications*

pp. 471-578

*Bibliography*

pp. 579-632

*Appendix*

Scenes of Prestige: The Built Environment and the Integration of a  
Multiracial Colonial Elite Class in Colonial Singapore

pp. 633-792



## Summary

Elites of different races in colonial Singapore made social connections amongst themselves and developed a sense of fellow membership in a cosmopolitan community of prestige by taking part together in a system of status symbols. These elites created and sustained their system of status symbols; and, in the absence of a shared culture, these elites were socially integrated by their shared symbolic system, which gave cohesion to their class. This fact is especially socially significant, given that colonial Singapore was a multiracial and culturally diverse Settlement, where the population was divided by cultural boundaries. Since the leading members of different sections of this population were represented among the elites, the elite class could not base its sense of community upon shared cultural heritage or identity. Thus, colonial Singapore presents a case which highlights the importance of social and symbolic integration, rather than cultural, ethnic, racial, or national foundations of elite class cohesion.

This study of the development of the multiracial elite class and its social integration through exchanges of symbolic capital in colonial Singapore challenges what are, perhaps, the conventional views of colonial history, especially, the emphasis on the role of conflict in social history and the emphasis on the role of Europeans in colonialism, an emphasis which tends to privilege the role of Europeans at the expense of non-Europeans, regardless of whether or not the European colonial activities are viewed as positive or negative. Instead, this study suggests an alternative approach to colonial social history, including a focus on the active *cooperation* of Asian and European elites

as partners in colonialism, as a crucial dynamic in colonial history; Asian elites eagerly cooperated as the partners of their European fellow elites, rather than merely being co-opted as subordinates. This study emphasises multiracial elite class identity and organisation, including the important role of the creation, sharing, and exchange of symbolic capital among Asian and European elites in the creation of the social capital and cohesion of their cosmopolitan elite class; and an appreciation of the crucial role of Asian elites as the partners of European elites in colonial history and empire-building. The colonial system (at least in Singapore and its Malayan hinterland) is seen as the outcome of a mutually-beneficial joint enterprise or alliance between Asian and European elites, a pattern of close multiethnic and multiracial cooperation which lasted for nearly one and a half centuries and created at least as many opulent Asian plutocrats as European tycoons.



**Introduction: A System of Status Symbols Shared by Asian and European Elites**

Elites of different races in colonial Singapore made social connections amongst themselves and developed a sense of fellow membership in a cosmopolitan community of prestige by taking part together in a system of status symbols. These elites created and sustained their system of status symbols; and, in the absence of a shared culture, these elites were socially integrated by their shared symbolic system, which gave cohesion to their class. This fact is especially socially significant, given that colonial Singapore was a multiracial and culturally diverse Settlement, where the population was divided by cultural boundaries. Since the leading members of different sections of this population were represented among the elites, the elite class could not base its sense of community upon shared cultural heritage or identity. Thus, colonial Singapore presents a case which highlights the importance of social and symbolic integration, rather than cultural, ethnic, racial, or national foundations of elite class cohesion.

The cultural differences among these elites were not really *barriers* to the extent that we might now imagine them to have been; in fact, the cultural boundaries were quite permeable and susceptible to being overcome and surmounted by central social bridges that were built upon the shared recognition of prestige and *face*, and the mutual participation of Asian and European elites in the colonial system of status symbols. The concept of *society* is not necessarily coterminous with *culture*; the population of a single society may include several sections, each belonging to a different cultural identity, yet linked to one another within a single social structure. Such was the society of colonial Singapore, and this study is concerned with an exploration of the symbolic ties with

## *Introduction*

linked the elites of different cultures into one community of prestige at the summit of this culturally diverse society.

Asian and European elites bridged the cultural differences among themselves – the distinctions that were due to their differences in background, heritage, ethnicity, and nationality – by participating together in the colonial system of status symbols, a system which integrated them socially and symbolically into a multiracial elite social class. Whatever the cultural distance between them, their shared recognition, consumption, and control of prestigious status symbols clearly affirmed their social proximity as fellow elite stakeholders, partners, and allies in *their* colonial system, while distinguishing them as an elite social class and setting them apart from non-elites. Major categories of symbols within this symbolic system included the symbols linked respectively to the British monarchy, the local cityscape, and the name of Sir Stamford Raffles, the founder of the Settlement of Singapore. These elites of different races shared in the ownership of their colonial society's prestigious symbols, traditions, history, and heritage, and ensured that these social resources were reproduced and handed on to their successors throughout the colonial era, from 1819 to 1959.

The mutually beneficial partnership of Asian elites and their European fellow elites – through their participation together in the colonial economic, social, and symbolic systems – was at the heart of colonial Singapore. This was the central dynamic around which revolved the history of the Settlement. By cooperating in creating, enhancing, and sustaining this symbolic system, in the investment of these symbols with social meaning, and in the distribution of the rewards of this system amongst themselves, Asian and European elites fostered the representation of colonial Singapore as having a single

## *Introduction*

multiracial social structure, in spite of its ethnic and racial diversity, and they asserted a vision of social reality in which both Asian and European elites alike were located at the centre of this diverse society. They presented a public image of elites of different races cooperating closely within the colonial system to their mutual benefit, and enjoying the rich material and symbolic rewards which flowed from their close partnership.

While the colonial elites of different races enhanced their own individual status on a personal level, they contributed to the organisation and stratification of their society on the basis of social class or status identity, rather than racial identity. The social structures and public representations at the summit level of the society of colonial Singapore emphasised the fellowship of Asian and European elites in their shared social distinctions of status and prestige, at least as much as the social boundaries implied by their cultural differences. The elite social institutions, rituals, symbols, and patterns of interactions which prevailed among Asian and European elites fostered their mutual recognition of one another as fellow *insiders* in terms of elite social status, rather than as *outsiders* or *others* in cultural or racial terms. The social integration of Asian elites into the colonial elite social class, and their cooperation in shaping and perpetuating their social structure, paralleled and complemented their economic integration and cooperation in the colonial economic system, a system within which the leading Asian elites in colonial Singapore became clearly the wealthiest inhabitants of this island, building vast family fortunes to be inherited by their descendants and which, in some cases, are still enjoyed by their heirs to this day.

Asian elites in colonial Singapore formally bought into the colonial system of status symbols by accepting this system's status rewards, including imperial honours

## *Introduction*

(such as knighthoods and orders of chivalry), invitations to social functions where they met Governors and visiting royalty, opportunities to take part in imperial celebrations, and appointments to prestigious local ranks, titles, and offices, as *Justices of the Peace*, *Grand Jurors*, *Municipal Commissioners*, *Legislative Councillors*, commissioned officers with the Chinese, Eurasian, and Malay Volunteer Companies, and members of committees that organised local imperial celebrations and received royal visitors. These symbolic transactions were inherently reciprocal; they were, in fact, exchanges of symbolic capital. By accepting colonial honours, Asian elites not only received symbolic capital, but also returned the favour, by implicitly affirming their acceptance of the authority and legitimacy of the colonial system, and providing an example for other Asian elites to follow – indeed, generations of Asian elites bought into the colonial system. They thus became both beneficiaries and investors in the colonial social and symbolic system, deriving symbolic benefits from it while contributing to the social value of its symbols at the same time.

By buying into the colonial system, Asian elites became key stakeholders in imperialism and leading beneficiaries of colonialism, who enjoyed rich economic and symbolic dividends from colonial development, in partnership with their Western colleagues in empire-building. By buying into the symbolic aspect of this colonial system – the system of status symbols – these Asian elites effected their social integration into the cosmopolitan elite class and located themselves within the social space at the centre of the colonial society, in much the same way that they bought into the economic aspects of the system by participating in the economy. These Asian and European colonial elites, partners and colleagues in an interracial joint enterprise of imperialism,

## *Introduction*

needed to work with each other in order to achieve their goals. Their exchange of symbolic capital cemented the networks of social ties, which integrated them into a social class or community of prestige.

Any inquiry into the nature of the colonial past of Asian lands is likely to raise what is, perhaps, the most obvious question about colonialism, in which Asian lands were supposedly dominated by relatively small numbers of Europeans who were stationed far from their homelands. This question is: How was it that these ostensibly European colonies managed to function for many years, despite the vast numerical superiority of the Asian population to the Europeans? In other words, how could so-called European colonies exist and survive, when there were so few Europeans in them?<sup>1</sup> The presence and power of European imperial armed forces, while an important factor, is insufficient to explain this remarkable phenomenon, which linked East and West, and brought about increasing interaction and mutual influence between the cultures of Asia and Europe. The answer or answers to this question cannot be reduced simply to a discussion of the preponderance of Western naval and military power; indeed, the investigation of this topic may lead to the conclusion that examples of supposedly European colonialism were, perhaps, actually more Asian than they might seem at first glance, or at least than the ways in which colonialism has often been depicted and represented in historical and popular imaginations.

Many of the leading protagonists and beneficiaries of colonialism in Asia were Asian colonial elites, who cooperated closely with their fellow elites from the West.

---

<sup>1</sup> See: D.A. Low, *Lion Rampant: Essays in the Study of British Imperialism*, p. 8. Ian Copland quoted D.A. Low in: *The Burden of Empire: Perspectives on Imperialism and Colonialism*, pp. 85-86. I am grateful to my doctoral supervisor, Associate Professor Tan Tai Yong for bringing this book to my attention.

## *Introduction*

Asian and Western colonial elites needed each other in order to succeed economically and symbolically in their colonial joint venture. The participation of Asian elites, and their cooperation with European elites, was integral to so-called Western colonialism, and Asian elites achieved a high degree of economic and social success within European empires. The central role and remarkable success of Asian elites within colonialism deserves recognition, which will foster an appreciation of the degree of historical continuity from colonial times to the present, as the descendants and successors of Asian colonial elites have continued to thrive in the globalised post-colonial world.

An exploration of the longevity of this so-called European colonialism leads to a consideration of the nature of the relationships, connections, and interactions between Asians and Europeans in colonial settings, and most especially those cooperative interactions which developed between Asian colonial elites and their European fellow elites. The character and development of colonial systems in Asia were closely related – if not entirely the products of – the cooperative and complementary relationship between Asian elites and their European fellow elites. To understand this relationship, we must consider what interests these elites shared in common, as well as the methods by which they initiated and sustained their cooperative interconnections. Although economic factors and relationships were certainly crucial, lucrative colonial economic transactions and partnerships occurred within an elite-level social context. This study is concerned with the development and nature of the network of social connections which formed this context. While there were most likely many parallels between elite-level interracial interactions in various colonial settings at different points in time, which would require the scholarly work of many lifetimes to survey, the present study is concerned with just

## *Introduction*

one place, the Southeast Asian colonial port city of Singapore, where the colonial era lasted for one hundred and forty years, from 1819 to 1959.

Asian and European elites in colonial Singapore shared interests in status and prestige or symbolic capital, and these shared interests activated their social integration into a multiethnic elite class in this colonial port city, transcending distinctions between racial and ethnic categories at the summit level and centre of this ethnically diverse society. Although Singapore was governed under European authority from 1819 to 1942 and from 1945 to 1959, most of the wealthy and socially prominent elites who resided in Singapore during those years were actually Asians, most of whom were Chinese. Asian and European elites here derived social and symbolic benefits, as well as economic and political rewards, from their cooperative relationship, an elite-level partnership which was essential to the colonial system. Singapore was colonised at least as much by Asian elites as by European elites, as they worked together to develop this colonial port city, and both enjoyed the rich rewards of their cooperation within the colonial system, in terms of economic, social, and symbolic capital; they had to work closely together to acquire these rewards. Asian and European elites alike were located together at the centre of the colonial society in Singapore, as well as at the summit levels of the economic and political systems; and the colonial system here belonged as much to the leading local Asians as to their European fellow elites.

### **Asian Elites as Forgotten People?**

Living in Singapore in the early twenty-first century, one gets the impression that, insofar as the society of colonial Singapore is remembered at all today, it tends to be viewed as a society of a mass of impoverished Asians (such as rickshaw pullers) and a

## *Introduction*

small group of privileged Europeans, with, perhaps, a sprinkling of a few wealthy Chinese philanthropists. In fact, while it is certainly true that there was a mass of Asian workers such as rickshaw pullers, there was also a large and prosperous Asian population, including wealthy and middle-class families. These prosperous Asians included not only Chinese, but also Arabs, Armenians, Eurasians, Indians, Jews, Malays, and Parsis, and the richest among them were evidently richer than any of the Europeans here. A substantial number of these prosperous Asians (and especially the leading Asian elites) socialised with their European fellow elites, belonged to the same or similar prestigious organisations, received the same types of colonial honours, and participated in the same colonial public rituals and celebrations.

Although it may seem somewhat strange to refer to *elites* as *forgotten* people, it may well be that the Asian elites of colonial Singapore have been largely (if not entirely) forgotten, in terms of the prominence which they enjoyed within the colonial society, and their economic cooperation and social integration with their European fellow elites.<sup>2</sup> Could it be that Singaporeans today are somewhat reluctant to remember the Asian colonial elites, or that there were class divisions within the Asian population? Perhaps it is more fashionable to remember those Asians who struggled within or against the colonial system, rather than the Asian elites benefited from colonialism. When wealthy Asians of the colonial era *are* remembered, there may be a tendency to emphasise the generous charitable activities and community leadership roles of some of these men, or

---

<sup>2</sup> Regarding *forgotten* people of the colonial era (including compradores), see: T.N. Harper, “ ‘Asian Values’ and Southeast Asian Histories,” *The Historical Journal*, Volume 40, Number 2 (June 1997), p. 513. I am grateful to Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied for kindly bringing this article to my attention. Chua Ai Lin has argued that more attention needs to be given to the English-speaking Asians of colonial Singapore. Chua Ai Lin, “Negotiating National Identity: The English-Speaking Domiciled Communities in Singapore, 1930-1941,” M.A. thesis, Department of History, National University of Singapore, 2001, pp. 5 and 138-139.



## *Introduction*

the fact that some of them were self-made millionaires – rather than noting the fact that many wealthy Asians revelled in luxurious lifestyles of ostentatious opulence, while eagerly enjoying prominence and prestige within the colonial system and endeavouring to establish their families as local dynasties.

To remember the roles and achievements of Asian elites in the colonial system involves not only remembering their cooperation with European elites and their major stakeholderhood within the colonial system, but also the highlighting of the class stratification within the Asian population of Singapore; this, in turn, might lead to an appreciation of elements of continuity in the social structure between the colonial and post-colonial eras, and even of the fact that at least some of the colonial-era elite Asian families maintained their elite status well into the post-colonial era. These social facts may be somewhat unpalatable for some people today; however, they should not be at all surprising, since such themes of social continuity and class stratification are likely to be found around the world. The general continuity of social structures across time, including class stratification and the inheritance of wealth and status, may be regarded as normal, in societies past and present around the world; and societies are divided as much by distinctions of economic and social class as they are by racial and cultural identities.

Writers in formerly colonised lands may quite naturally wish to downplay the reality of class differences within their own nations, in the past as well as in the present, and instead imagine their colonial-era societies as having been united in proto-nationalist struggle against colonialism. Such an image would be promoted by a depiction of the colonial elite class as having been mostly (if not entirely) comprised of Westerners, and applying the terms *colonialist* and *imperialist* only to Europeans, despite the fact that so

## Introduction

many of the wealthy elites in colonised countries were non-Europeans. This study, however, suggests a very different understanding of both *colonialism* and *colonialists*: a realisation that colonialism in Singapore and its Malayan hinterland was at least as much Asian as it was European,<sup>3</sup> that Asian elites were among the leading stakeholders in this system, and that the Asian and European colonial elites were socially integrated through their participation together in the same symbolic system involving the symbolic issues of status and prestige – the symbolic rewards which were desired by Asian and Western elites alike. The role of Asian elites as successful partners and stakeholders in colonialism should be duly appreciated, and this leads to recognition of the fact that colonialism could take the form of a multiracial and mutually-beneficial partnership or joint venture of Asian and European elites, in which Asian and European elites were linked together not only through their cooperative participation in the same colonial economic system, but also through their participation together in the colonial social structure and its system of status symbols.

Evidence suggesting that Chinese and other Asians are much less likely to be perceived as *colonialists* than Westerners may be found through Google searches of the Internet, as well as through consultation of JSTOR, an archive of scholarly journals. The mentions of colonialists found in JSTOR may reflect scholarly perceptions, while the findings of a Google search could reflect more general popular perceptions. Here are the results of a search for different types of colonialists in Google and JSTOR in late 2007:

---

<sup>3</sup> This may have been true in other Asian lands as well. For example, see the description of the prominent role of Arabs and Chinese in the Dutch East Indies, in: J. Macmillan Brown, *The Dutch East: Sketches and Pictures* (1914), pp. 149-159. Regarding Asian capital in the colonial era, see: Rajat Kanta Ray, "Asian Capital in the Age of European Domination: The Rise of the Bazaar, 1800-1914," *Modern Asian Studies*, Volume 29, Number 3 (July 1995), pp. 449-554. Regarding Chinese as *colonizers* in colonial Hong Kong, see: John M. Carroll, *Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong*, p. 18. I am grateful to NUS Central Library Senior Librarian Tim Yap Fuan for kindly bringing this book to my attention.

## Introduction

<i>colonialists</i>	JSTOR	Google Singapore	Google Malaysia	Google world- wide
<i>Asian colonialists</i>	0	0	2	41
<i>Chinese colonialists</i>	1	0	0	201
<i>Italian colonialists</i>	18	2	0	1,460
<i>German colonialists</i>	32	2	0	2,080
<i>Japanese colonialists</i>	20	7	1	2,190
<i>Belgian colonialists</i>	22	1	0	2,510
<i>American colonialists</i>	42	3	3	2,930
<i>Portuguese colonialists</i>	69	9	3	3,680
<i>Dutch colonialists</i>	47	63	36	5,030
<i>Western colonialists</i>	45	20	44	5,360
<i>Spanish colonialists</i>	25	5	5	8,870
<i>French colonialists</i>	169	100	14	20,200
<i>European colonialists</i>	173	38	35	20,600
<i>British colonialists</i>	207	228	398	31,000

These numbers may indicate that popular perceptions of the relative representation of different nationalities among colonialists, that is, the perceived *population*, so to speak, of colonialists as depicted online, lean towards the perception that colonialists were generally Europeans (especially British) or Japanese, but rarely Asian or Chinese. According to these popular perceptions as revealed on the Internet, colonialists are (or were) over 150 times more likely to be British than to be Chinese, despite the fact that the Chinese Empire was already thriving when Britain was still a colony of the Roman Empire. These numbers may suggest that the great successes enjoyed by ancient Asian imperialists have been largely forgotten in the popular perception, or at least that much greater attention is given to the activities of more recent Western imperialists. It would seem that the role of Asians as colonialists – whether in Asian empires or within Western empires – has been largely overlooked; and while there

## *Introduction*

has been some acknowledgement of the role of Japanese as colonialists, both Google and JSTOR suggest that even Belgium is perceived as having produced more colonialists than Japan, despite the fact that the Japanese Empire colonised Taiwan, Korea, and Manchuria, and briefly occupied much of China and Southeast Asia.

The evidence from the Internet suggests that Asians are not generally perceived as colonialists, with the notable exception of the Japanese; and, moreover, that aside from the Japanese, the role of *colonialist* is almost exclusively associated with Westerners. From an historical perspective, this seems rather ironic, considering that many non-Western peoples were very successful in their imperial and colonial endeavours. The Chinese, Assyrian, Persian, and Aztec, Inca, and Majapahit Empires are a few examples of non-Western empires. Even some European countries were subjected to colonial rule by non-Western imperialists: invaders from northern Africa conquered and colonised Spain in the eighth century, and Ottoman imperialists invaded and colonised Greece and the Balkan Peninsula in the fifteenth century. Clearly, a variety of non-Western peoples have played prominent roles in the history of empire-building and colonisation in different areas of the world, and any account of imperialism and colonialism should give due regard to non-Western as well as Western imperialists.

The Internet evidence suggests that there may be a real reluctance to see non-Japanese Asians in the role of colonialists. The apparent perception of the term *colonialist* as applying almost exclusively to Westerners would seem to deny recognition to any significant role for Asian elites within European colonial empires. But, was Asian agency within colonialism really as insignificant as might be suggested by the numbers from the Google and JSTOR searches? Historical evidence from colonial Singapore

## *Introduction*

suggests that Asian colonial elites actually played a very prominent and active role in imperial developments. Their activities could suggest that their wholehearted support for colonialism and imperialism resulted from rational considerations, because they felt that supporting the Empire clearly served their own interests, symbolically as well as financially.

### **Were Asian Elites Actually Imperialists and Colonialists?**

This study will consider the question of whether or not some Asians not only participated actively in colonialism and imperialism, but were also enthusiastic and highly-successful imperialists and colonialists in their own right, in close cooperation with their Western fellow colonial elites. How successful were Asian elites within the context of Western colonialism? To what extent can Western colonialism be seen as an accomplishment of Asian elites? This consideration may lead to the accordance of due recognition to Asian colonial elites, by appreciating the extent to which these Asian elites were located at the centre of the colonial system, as active protagonists and major stakeholders in colonialism, symbolically and socially, as well as economically.

History provides us with examples of Asian elites who clearly sympathised with Western imperialism. Colonel (later General Sir) Orfeur Cavenagh, who became Governor of the Straits Settlements in 1859, recalled that Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa, a prominent Cantonese businessman in Singapore, advised him on how the British could most effectively use military force to compel the Manchu imperial government of China to agree to British terms to end the Second Opium War, since Whampoa felt that it was useless to attempt to negotiate with the Manchu authorities. Governor Cavenagh passed Whampoa's advice along to Lord Elgin, the British High Commissioner and

## Introduction

Plenipotentiary in China.<sup>4</sup> This was around the time that European forces destroyed the *Yüan-ming Yüan*, the Manchu Emperor's Summer Palace. Given that this was also the time of the Taiping Rebellion, perhaps it should be no surprise that an immigrant from southern China would have no sympathy for China's Manchu imperial rulers!<sup>5</sup> Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa also supported the deployment of European soldiers to intimidate riotous elements among the Chinese population in Singapore, as he explained after an outbreak of Chinese rioting on this island in 1872.<sup>6</sup> The colonial authorities in Singapore were very grateful to Whampoa for all of his support and assistance over the years, and Queen Victoria honoured Whampoa by appointing him to be the first Chinese Member of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements in 1869.<sup>7</sup> In 1876, Queen Victoria appointed Whampoa a Companion of the Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George, or CMG, and Governor Jervois invested Whampoa with the insignia of the Order in a grand ceremony at the Singapore Town Hall that was attended by a crowd of local Asian and European elites, including Maharajah Abu Bakar of Johore.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, in 1873, many Chinese merchants in Singapore, including Tan Kim Cheng, Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa, Tan Beng Swee, and Tan Seng Poh, petitioned Queen Victoria to bring order to the turbulent Malay States and protect the interests of the Singapore Chinese merchants; they were joined in their petition by many Chinese merchants of Malacca and Penang.<sup>9</sup> In the following year, the imperial authorities appointed the first British Residents in Perak, Selangor, and Negri Sembilan, thus

---

<sup>4</sup> General Sir Orfeur Cavenagh, *Reminiscences of an Indian Official*, pp. 283-284.

<sup>5</sup> See: C.M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements*, pp. 128-129.

<sup>6</sup> Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers: Governing Multiracial Singapore 1867-1914*, p. 52, quoting a report of a commission on the riots of October 1872 in CO 273 / 65.

<sup>7</sup> *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, No. 52, 24 December 1869, p. 774, Government Notification No. 249.

<sup>8</sup> *Straits Times*, 13 May 1876, p. 2, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016425.

<sup>9</sup> Colonial Office Files CO 273, Volume 67, Number 8641, Despatch 188, pp. 316-332.

## Introduction

extending imperial influence into the Malay States through the Residential system and securing Singapore's Malayan hinterland,<sup>10</sup> where Chinese entrepreneurs would amass vast fortunes from tin mines, rubber plantations, and the sale of opium to their own Chinese workers.<sup>11</sup>

In the nineteenth century, Chinese opium merchants in Singapore (who were known as opium *farmers*) accumulated enormous wealth by profiting from the sale of this highly-addictive drug to their fellow Chinese,<sup>12</sup> in much the same way that multinational corporations and governments around the world today profit from the sale of highly addictive and poisonous cigarettes. One of the leading opium merchants in Singapore in the nineteenth century was Cheang Hong Lim, who was also a major landowner, a generous philanthropist, and a Justice of the Peace,<sup>13</sup> whose name is commemorated in Hong Lim Green, a park which resulted from his generosity and public spirit.<sup>14</sup> In 1889, Cheang Hong Lim donated funds to help pay for a battery of four Maxim machine guns for the Singapore Volunteer Artillery.<sup>15</sup> The Maxim guns arrived in Singapore in 1891.<sup>16</sup> These formidable weapons – which had been developed only in the mid-1880s – would be available to be used by the Singapore Volunteer soldiers to deal with Chinese rioters in a most effective and final manner, or, indeed, with anyone else who dared to threaten the colonial system, a system which included and protected the highly lucrative business

---

<sup>10</sup> Anthony Webster, *Gentlemen Capitalists: British Imperialism in South East Asia 1770-1890*, pp. 187-188.

<sup>11</sup> John Butcher, "Loke Yew," in: John Butcher and Howard Dick, editors, *The Rise and Fall of Revenue Farming: Business Elites and the Emergence of the Modern State in Southeast Asia*, pp. 255-260.

<sup>12</sup> Carl A Trocki, *Opium and Empire: Chinese Society in Colonial Singapore, 1800 – 1910*.

<sup>13</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 168-170.

<sup>14</sup> *Straits Times*, 19 August 1876, no page number, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016425.

<sup>15</sup> Colonial Office Files CO 273, Volume 160, Number 13757, Despatch 276, from Governor Sir Cecil Clementi Smith to Lord Knutsford, dated 7 June 1889.

<sup>16</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel G.A. Derrick, "Singapore Volunteers," in: Walter Makepeace et al., eds., *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume One, pp. 386-387.

## *Introduction*

interests of many Asian businessmen, including the rich opium merchant Cheang Hong Lim, J.P. The Chinese company of the Singapore Volunteer Corps was established in 1901 at the request of some of the leading local Chinese,<sup>17</sup> and prominent Singapore Chinese served as Volunteers until the Japanese conquered Singapore in 1942, when the Chinese Volunteers demonstrated their loyalty to their King and their Empire in the face of an overwhelming invasion.<sup>18</sup>

Clearly, some – if not all – of the leading Chinese elites in colonial Singapore were firmly on the side of the so-called *Western* colonialism and imperialism. The business interests of these wealthy Chinese were closely tied to the interests of their European fellow elites. The Honourable Legislative Councillor Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa, CMG, Justice of the Peace Cheang Hong Lim, and many other Chinese elites in colonial Singapore, as well as other local Asian elites, made it quite clear to everyone by their public activities and acceptance of imperial honours that they were on the side of the British Empire and the colonial system – as, indeed, the nature of their interests really made it *their* Empire and *their* colonial system, as much as it was anyone's.<sup>19</sup>

The very real shared interests of Asian and European elites in the success of colonialism and imperialism evidently won out over any imaginary sense of racial or cultural solidarity. Asian support for the British Empire was not limited to Chinese elites. Sultan Abu Bakar of Johore and his son, Sultan Ibrahim, were both loyal supporters of the Empire. Sultan Abu Bakar donated funds for the Maxim guns for the Singapore

---

<sup>17</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History*, pp. 195, 236, 327-328, and 415.

<sup>18</sup> Yap Pheng Geck, *Scholar, Banker, Gentleman Soldier: The Reminiscences of Dr. Yap Pheng Geck*, pp. 43-48.

<sup>19</sup> See a European visitor's first-hand observations of Singapore Chinese in 1894, in: Henry Norman, *The Peoples and Politics of The Far East* (Sixth Impression, 1901), p. 42.



## *Introduction*

Volunteers in 1889,<sup>20</sup> along with members of the Arab, Chinese, Indian, and Malay communities.<sup>21</sup> Eurasians and Malays served as Volunteer soldiers in the early decades of the twentieth century;<sup>22</sup> together with the Chinese and European Volunteers, they trained to fight in defence of *their* British Empire. Sultan Ibrahim of Johore personally commanded the Johore Military Forces during the suppression of a mutiny of Indian soldiers in Singapore in 1915.<sup>23</sup> Sultan Ibrahim donated £500,000 for Singapore defence preparations in 1935; this donation was used to provide two fifteen-inch guns at Tanah Merah, and for the construction of airfields at Tengah and Sembawang.<sup>24</sup> These were the contributions of Asian elites to a colonial and imperial system of which these non-Western elites were leading stakeholders and beneficiaries, on a par with their Western fellow elites. It was a colonial system in which many Asian elites evidently took great pride in playing prominent roles, and one from which they derived enormous material and symbolic rewards.

It should be stressed that this study does not presume to make value judgements about colonialism, but instead strives toward an objective and detached perspective. The following pages will offer neither condemnation nor praise for colonialism. Whether or not this study should be interpreted as evidence for an indictment of the complicity of Asian elites in colonialism and imperialism, or as praise for the achievements of

---

<sup>20</sup> Colonial Office Files CO 273, Volume 160, Number 13757, Despatch 276, from Governor Sir Cecil Clementi Smith to Lord Knutsford, dated 7 June 1889.

<sup>21</sup> Chiang Ming Shun, "The Weakest go to the Wall: From Money to Mutiny 1892-1918," in: Malcolm Murfett et al., *Between Two Oceans*, p. 123.

<sup>22</sup> A.H. Carlos, "Eurasian Volunteers," in: Makepeace et al, *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume One, pp. 392-394; Wan Meng Hao, "Malay Soldiering in Singapore, 1910-1942," in: Khoo Kay Kim et al, *Malays / Muslims in Singapore*, pp. 183-219.

<sup>23</sup> Chiang Ming Shun, "The Weakest go to the Wall: From Money to Mutiny 1892-1918," in: Malcolm Murfett et al., *Between Two Oceans*, p. 131.

<sup>24</sup> Malcolm H. Murfett, "A Keystone of Imperial Defence or a Millstone around Britain's Neck? Singapore 1919-1941," In: Malcolm H. Murfett et al., *Between Two Oceans*, p. 164.

## *Introduction*

successful Asian entrepreneurs, depends on value judgements about colonialism and imperialism – but this study leaves such judgements entirely to its readers. Instead, this work endeavours to contribute a better understanding of colonialism in Singapore, especially with regard to its social ramifications among the elites of various races. The evident eagerness with which Asian elites in colonial Singapore took part in imperial celebrations, accepted imperial honours, and participated in the colonial system of status symbols, strongly suggests that they did not view the words *colonialism* and *imperialism* as pejorative terms.

If Asian nationalist historians wish to portray colonialism as a force for evil,<sup>25</sup> then it is only natural for them to depict all colonialists as European foreigners – thus, the colonialists would be portrayed as Western *others*, while excluding Asian colonial elites from the reviled category or label of *colonialists*. But, to obtain an accurate picture of the reality of colonialism, we must reject any tendency to see colonialists as merely foreign *others*; rather, we must recognise that many of the leading colonialists were actually prominent leaders of local Asian communities. Indeed, some – if not all – of the Asian elites of colonial Singapore might have been proud to have been labelled as colonialists and imperialists, since they took such a close interest in *their* British Empire.

### **The Agency of Asian Colonial Elites within Colonialism**

Colonialism in Singapore and its Malayan hinterland cannot be understood without an appreciation of the *agency* or active role of the Asian elites, the members of a prominent section within the local population who were at the very centre of the colonial

---

<sup>25</sup> See the comments regarding post-war historians in: T.N. Harper, “‘Asian Values’ and Southeast Asian Histories,” *The Historical Journal*, Volume 40, Number 2 (June 1997), p. 513. See the discussion of anti-colonial nationalism in: S. Rajaratnam, *The Prophetic and the Political: Selected Speeches and Writings of S. Rajaratnam*, edited by Chan Heng Chee and Obaid ul Haq, pp. 139-146.

## *Introduction*

system here. Colonialism in Singapore and Malaya was even more a practice of Asian elites than of European elites, as evinced by the fact that Asian elites enjoyed the reputation of being the richest inhabitants of Singapore and its Malayan hinterland, the owners of extensive properties (including plantations, mines, ships, houses, and commercial properties), the captains of business, industry, and finance, and the controllers of large numbers of labourers. Colonialism itself was a joint venture of a multiracial elite class, in which many (if not all) of the leading Asians were interested as key stakeholders or major shareholders in the continued operation of this system. Research into the activities and successes of Asian elites in colonial Singapore can lead to an appreciation of the *Asian-ness*, so to speak, of colonialism in this Settlement, and, by extension, throughout its Malayan hinterland as well. As Asian elites participated in, and contributed to, the colonial symbolic system and social structure, in partnership with their European fellow elites, these prominent Asians thereby contributed to the public legitimation of the symbolism, authority, and prestige of the colonial system and of the Empire of which it was a component, just as they also contributed to the perpetuation and success of the colonial and imperial economic systems.

An exploration of the *Asian-ness* of colonialism leads to a rethinking of colonialism itself, towards a view of colonialism which is somewhat different from what may be the conventional view that emphasises Western agency, and places Asians in the role of outsiders vis-à-vis the colonial system, as merely passive subjects, servile subordinates, or, perhaps, as heroic opponents of colonialism. In fact, since colonialism was largely carried out by and for Asian elites, at least as much as it was by and for Western elites, colonialism cannot be understood without giving due regard to the role of

## *Introduction*

its non-Western elite protagonists and stakeholders. Recognition of the economic and social success of Asian elites who thrived *within* the colonial system, in partnership with their European fellow elites, would clearly not conform to a simplistic image of the colonial era as an era characterised mainly by racial conflict or proto-nationalist struggle, with all the Asians classified together in one category as the exploited victims of oppression. Not only were the Asian inhabitants of Singapore *not* united in opposition to the colonial system, but a significant number of Asians actively supported this system, and clearly benefited from it, in terms of both wealth and prestige. Of course, it was only natural for Asian elites to support the colonial system and the Empire, since these Asians clearly enjoyed such enormous benefits within the status quo, and their successful participation in colonialism paved the way for the future success of their descendants, as the privileged heirs to local dynasties of wealth and prestige.

The Asian and European elites of colonial Singapore created social capital, the networks of social connections and patterns of interactions which comprised their social class, by socially linking, integrating, and organising themselves through their cooperation in the evolution of new traditions, institutions, and public imagery, through their participation together in the performance of public rituals and spectacular ceremonies, and through their creation and social exchange of symbolic capital involving prestige, honours, and status. These prominent Asians and Europeans exchanged symbolic capital by honouring each other through association with one another and the inclusion of each other in prestigious rituals, organisations, and means of publicity, as well as by publicly praising and toasting each other, and bestowing formal honours and titles upon one another. In these ways, they paid each other compliments, implicitly as

## *Introduction*

well as explicitly, enhancing their reputations and nourishing each other's egos, while they cultivated their social connections and integrated themselves together into a multiracial elite social class.

The reciprocal social exchange of symbolic capital among Asian and European elites fostered interracial elite-level social connections, which located them together in the same region of social space at the centre of the colonial society, and combined them into a cosmopolitan elite class. Working together to accumulate symbolic capital provided Asian and European elites with opportunities to get acquainted with one another and develop their social connections, gaining social and symbolic rewards from one another and building the social capital of their class. This social elite class was a multiracial community of prestige; it united the racially and culturally diverse social structure at the elite level, and provided the cosmopolitan society with a centre and with a degree of unity, at least in the upper echelons of the society. The mutually-rewarding patterns of economic and political cooperation between Asian and European elites here occurred within the context of the social medium provided by their social integration as a multiracial elite class.

### **The Asian-ness or Asian Component of Colonialism and Imperialism**

What does it mean to re-think colonialism and imperialism and recognise the Asian-ness of these historical phenomena? Were colonialism and imperialism not really Western after all? In fact, so-called Western colonialism and imperialism were *both* Western *and* Asian. To understand how something can be both Western and Asian at the same time, consider the example of so-called Western clothing, something that is quite familiar to almost everyone in the early twenty-first century. In Singapore today, most

## *Introduction*

Singaporeans wear so-called Western clothing, often with famous Western brand-name labels. But, it seems likely that almost all of the so-called Western clothing sold and worn in Singapore was actually made in Asia by Asian workers, in factories owned by wealthy Asian manufacturers. Even famous Western brand-name clothing is actually made in Asia by Asians. Singaporeans and other Asians purchase their Asian-made (but so-called Western) clothing in stores in Asia that are owned and staffed by Asians, and that cater to a predominantly Asian consumer base. The huge Asian consumer market may now account for most consumers of so-called Western clothing.

To what extent, then, is such clothing still Western? Although such clothing has been extensively appropriated by Asians, the Western linkages still cannot be denied. The historical background of these clothing designs is indeed Western, and the consumers of such clothing around the world – by Asians as well as Westerners, Pacific Islanders, and others – may indeed regard such clothing as distinctively Western, no matter where it is made, who makes it, who buys it, and who profits from it. Yet, the fact remains that much of so-called Western clothing worldwide is actually made in Asia by Asian workers in factories owned by wealthy Asians. Even the Western clothing that is sold in the West and purchased by Westerners is actually largely imported from Asia, having been manufactured in Asia by Asians employed by Asians. In many non-Western countries, the wearing of so-called Western clothing is now as much a part of ordinary daily life as it is in the West. It might be fair to say that blue jeans and other Western-style garments have largely taken the place of the wearing of traditional Asian clothing in many Asian countries, just as modern Western-style clothing may have largely displaced the wearing of kilts in Scotland or *lederhosen* in Bavaria.

## *Introduction*

While modern Western clothing may indeed still be Western in some sense, it is not simply or exclusively Western anymore – in fact, it may not even be *mainly* Western today, having become an international and *globalised* style of clothing. What may be regarded as Western cultural imperialism by means of clothing could actually be an example of Asians appropriating Western cultural products and consuming them, while Asian capitalists are enriched by the manufacture and sale of these so-called Western goods, which are bought by both Asians and Westerners alike. To think of Western-style clothing as purely Western would be to ignore the important Asian component in such clothing, a non-Western component which may now be the most important element in such so-called Western clothing. This Asian component involves Asians as manufacturers, retailers, consumers, and exporters of Western-style clothing on a global scale. The Asian appropriation of Western clothing has been so successful that, not only are most Asians apparently wearing such clothes, but Westerners are probably buying most of their clothing from Asians. Western-style clothing is now Asian as well as Western – indeed, Western clothing may now be even more Asian than Western.

The reality of so-called Western clothing today is more complicated than a simplistic *Western* label would imply. The same may be said of other technological innovations which have diffused from the West to Asia, and which have been adopted enthusiastically by Asians in terms of both production and consumption – for example, beer, bread, automobiles, telephones, airplanes, and computers. All of these technologies have long moved beyond being merely Western. These innovations are not only produced and consumed by Asians: Asians can also modify and improve upon them. New advances in computers, telecommunications, medicine, and all other technologies

## *Introduction*

may be as much Asian as Western. Perhaps it would be fair to say that computers and mobile telephones are now no more Western than the so-called Western clothing that Asians make, sell, buy, wear, and export. The *Western* label can disguise a more complicated reality, in which what is described as Western may actually be both Western and non-Western.

So-called *Western* colonialism and imperialism were also more complex than the Western label would seem to suggest. An exploration of the role of Asian elites within colonialism and imperialism as stakeholders and protagonists, and even as colonialists and imperialists, together with an appreciation of the *social* and *symbolic* dimensions of the interaction between Asians and Westerners in the colonial context (as opposed to the Furnivallian fixation on the economic dimension) may help contribute towards a fuller understanding of so-called Western colonialism and imperialism – specifically, an understanding which recognises the active role of Asian elites in both colonialism and imperialism. Social and symbolic processes, as well as economic activities, incorporated Asian elites into the British Empire, and these Asian elites became highly successful imperial and colonial stakeholders, in social and symbolic terms as well as economically. Their prominent role within imperialism and colonialism deserves recognition. The Asian elite class survived the transition to independence, thus providing an important element of continuity between the colonial and post-colonial eras. So-called European colonialism and imperialism were actually *both Western and Asian* – as, indeed, is the globalised international capitalistic system of the twenty-first century. A fuller appreciation of the non-Western component in imperialism and colonialism in the



nineteenth and twentieth centuries may lead to a better understanding of the continuities between those centuries and the present day.

**Conspicuous Participation: Exchange, Pooling, and Consumption of Symbolic Capital**

Asian and European elites were defined as members of the multiracial elite class through their conspicuous participation in a system of status symbols, including their association with central institutions and rituals, and their receipt of honours. Within this social structure with its system of status symbols, these elites engaged in the social exchange of symbolic resources, which they created and consumed together. These exchanges occurred both *directly* between individuals, as well as *indirectly*, through the medium of the system of status symbols, including prestigious rituals and institutions. These exchanges of the symbolic capital of prestige and status fostered social connections, integration, and a sense of community among Asian and European elites, uniting them in the communion of shared consumption of status symbols.

On an individual level, *direct* social exchanges of symbolic capital occurred when individuals associated with one another, praised each other in front of others, and honoured each other with social inclusion, by inviting one another to their important social functions and distinguished social circles – in other words, by giving social recognition or *face* to others.<sup>26</sup> In this way, individuals could enhance one another's prestige and social status. These direct exchanges were potentially reciprocal – the givers of *face* enhanced the prestige or symbolic capital of those whom they honoured; and the recipients of such social honour returned the favour merely by accepting, since the

---

<sup>26</sup> Regarding the giving of *face* or *mien-tzŭ*, see: Hsien Chin Hu, "The Chinese Concepts of 'Face'." *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Volume 46, Number 1, Part 1 (January-March 1944), p. 56.

## Introduction

acceptance of an honour or compliment implies a recognition by the recipient that the giver has sufficient status to make the gift in the first place – acceptance implies a recognition by the recipient that the giver is a peer of the recipient, or at least that they are in the same league.

The higher the socially-recognised status and prestige of the receiver, the higher is the symbolic value of this receiver's acceptance of an honour, and the greater the prestige that the giver will derive from the acceptance of the honour given. The giving and acceptance of an honour is a reciprocal exchange, since the acceptance of the honour is, in effect, another honour in its own right, given by the receiver of the first honour back to the giver. Thus, the social exchange of the symbolic capital of recognition of social status and prestige (or *face*) is a form of gift exchange which can both initiate and strengthen the personal connections (or social capital) between individuals,<sup>27</sup> while enhancing their social position and personal self-esteem at the same time.<sup>28</sup>

### **Indirect Social Exchanges through Pooling in the Central Status Symbols**

However, such direct social exchanges were only part of the story of elite social interaction and integration. Social exchanges occurred not only *directly* between individuals, but also – and perhaps even more importantly – *indirectly*, between

---

<sup>27</sup> Regarding social exchange, see: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter XI, seventh paragraph; Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, pp. 387 and 389; Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, p. 175; Marcel Mauss, *The Gift (Essai sur le don)*, p. 10 and 11; Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship (Les Structures Élémentaires de la Parenté)*, pp. 59-60 and 68; Peter M. Blau, *Exchange and Power in Social Life*, pp. 4, 89, 92, and 107; Alvin W. Gouldner, "The Norm of Reciprocity: A Preliminary Statement," *American Sociological Review*, Volume 25, Number 2 (April 1960), pp. 161-178; William J. Goode, *The Celebration of Heroes: Prestige as a Social Control System*, pp. x, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 26, 31, 33, 40, 41, and 42-43; Peter P. Ekeh, *Social Exchange Theory: The Two Traditions*; Pierre Bourdieu, "The Economy of Symbolic Goods," in: *Practical Reason*, pp. 100 and 104; and: Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets: The Art of Social Relationships in China*, pp. 6 and 8.

<sup>28</sup> On the relationship between self-esteem and the craving for prestige, see: A.H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," in: Jay M. Shafritz and Albert C. Hyde, editors, *Classics of Public Administration*, p. 136, endnote 18.

## *Introduction*

individuals and the central institutions and symbols of the society – that is, honours or symbolic capital flowed from individuals to institutions and symbols, and then back to individuals, giving them a sense of social integration as a group or community. Borrowing terminology used by Marshall Sahlins, this form of social exchange may be described as the *pooling* and redistribution of social and symbolic resources, which fostered a sense of social *centricity*.<sup>29</sup> Like investors who pool their economic capital by purchasing stock in a corporation, and then receive dividends or shares in the profits of that company, the elites of different races in colonial Singapore cooperated in the establishment of the central symbols and institutions of their society, including public rituals associated with royalty and Raffles, as well as other new local traditions, and locating them at the centre of the local society by means of public representations. The elites invested these symbols with meanings connected with symbolic capital; and these elites enjoyed the symbolic benefits conferred by these central symbols and institutions. Elites contributed to the symbolic value of rituals and social functions by attending these gatherings, and this enhanced the prestige and status-conferring value of the central institutions, names, heritage and traditions which these gatherings celebrated – indeed, this created and reproduced the central symbols themselves, and made their prestige value and centrality socially real.

These elites gained the social rewards of the confirmation and enhancement of their own personal prestige and status by taking part in these distinguished social events and rituals, and basking in the honour of one another's distinguished company. The more that these symbols were invested with social significance, the more that elites benefited from this system and were thereby motivated to continue such investment; this, in turn,

---

<sup>29</sup> On the concepts of *centricity* and *pooling*, see: Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, pp. 188-190.

## *Introduction*

encouraged the further participation of elites in this system, and the attraction of succeeding generations of elites. The gravitational pull of this system of prestige, which reinforced itself by attracting still more prestige, may be described as a version of the Matthew Effect;<sup>30</sup> it attracted ambitious people like a social magnet, and it gave the system of status symbols a life of its own. This self-reinforcing, self-reproducing social mechanism of elite-level social integration sustained the continuity of the system and activated its further elaboration over time.

Once status symbols had been sanctified with social significance through the efforts of elites, these symbols attracted still more elites to associate with them as well. The association of elites with these central symbols benefited not only the elites as individuals, by confirming and enhancing the status of these elites, but also sustained and enriched the symbolic system which underpinned the integration of the elite class, by contributing to the social importance of the status symbols in a self-reinforcing process – a mechanism of elite-level social integration through the pooling and exchange of symbolic capital within a system of status symbols. The more that elites participated in this system, the more symbolic benefits they received, and the more reason they had to continue to participate together; and their continued involvement and contribution to this system made it all the more attractive to succeeding generations of elites and would-be elites, motivating them to join in and keep the system functioning over time. These social processes fostered a multiracial elite social structure, providing the plural society with a sense of *centricity*, and bridging the ethnic divisions of the society at its summit.

---

<sup>30</sup> See: Robert K. Merton, “The Matthew Effect in Science,” in: Robert K. Merton, *The Sociology of Science: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations*, pp. 439-459.

## *Introduction*

By pooling meanings and associations of symbolic capital in the status symbols of names and places, public rituals and institutions, honours, publications, and new local traditions, Asian and European elites created a symbolic system, a social mechanism for prestige, which exerted a magnetic effect on ambitious people of all races, attracting them to participate in this system of colonial status symbols. It was only natural for ambitious individuals to want to belong to this system and to aspire to be associated with its status symbols – and for them to want to avoid being left out. This social mechanism was self-perpetuating and self-reproducing, as generations of elites were attracted into it and motivated to sustain and enhance the prestige value of its status symbols, in which they were all stakeholders. By cultivating and enjoying these status symbols, Asian and European elites exchanged symbolic capital amongst themselves through the medium of the symbolic system, and their exchange and shared consumption of these symbols incorporated them into a community of prestige.

The continued participation of Asian and European elites in the symbolic system invested and reinvested the symbolic system with prestige, while continually enhancing the status of the participating elites, thus providing them with a self-reinforcing feedback loop which gave them every reason to continue their participation and cooperation in the symbolic realm of the theatre of prestige. The elites needed each other in this process – they worked together to cultivate the symbolic system, so that they could individually benefit from its rewards; but their motivation for individual prestige gains served the broader interest of promoting the social integration of their class and the continuity of its institutions and structure over time. The nature of their ongoing patterns of social exchange, through practices which became customary and routine, emphasised the

## *Introduction*

symbolic mutual interdependence of Asian and European elites – a symbolic interdependence which paralleled and complemented their equally-mutual economic and political interdependence within the colonial and imperial system. Their partnership in the realm of the symbolic capital of prestige and status was a crucial aspect of the multiracial and international partnership of elites which underpinned the Empire.

### **Taking the Plural Society Concept Beyond Furnivall**

This study challenges the preoccupation with racial segregation in the study of colonial societies, and especially the tendency to emphasise racial and cultural divisions in depictions of society in colonial Singapore, a view of the past which seems to be as prevalent today as it was in the colonial era itself, and which may portray colonial Singapore as the setting of several distinct societies which were completely separated from one another by different racial and cultural identities – when, in fact, there were actually interethnic social linkages at the elite level. Any study which sets out to explore the history of one section of the colonial society here – for example, a history of the Chinese in Singapore, or the Indians, or the British – may convey to its readers the impression that each of these categories was a *completely separate* society (that is, a society in which none of the insiders interacted socially with outsiders), by highlighting the separateness or Furnivallian social compartmentalisation of each racial or ethnic section.

However, such images of alleged racial compartmentalisation may be not so much a reflection of the reality of the colonial past, as a product of written descriptions which have emphasised racial divisions in the tradition of the Furnivallian conception of the

## *Introduction*

colonial *plural society*.<sup>31</sup> Instead, this study explores the extent to which the colonial society here was *one* diverse society (as well as being a collection of different ethnic communities), by exploring the ways in which the different sections of the population were socially linked together at the elite level. The Asian and European elites of colonial Singapore inhabited a *shared social and symbolic world*, as well as belonging to their own particular ethnic communities. This study explores the life of this shared social and symbolic world as a multiracial community of prestige, within which Asian and European fellow elites participated together in rituals, celebrations, and other activities, thereby socially interacting with one another and with their shared system of status symbols.

While the different racial and ethnic sections of the diverse population may indeed be seen as different and distinctive societies or communities, they were certainly *not* completely separate or socially compartmentalised from one another; they were, in fact, components within a larger, plural and cosmopolitan social system – a system in which people of different racial and ethnic identities interacted with one another, not only economically (as in Furnivall's notion of the plural society), but also socially as well. The colonial society here may be seen as a single society, albeit one with plural characteristics, yet with distinctions of economic standing and social class cutting across the ethnic boundaries; a racially and ethnically diverse society which was socially integrated (to some degree, at least) through overarching elite-level social connections and shared elite status between people of different racial and cultural identities.

---

<sup>31</sup> Regarding J.S. Furnivall's conception of the *plural society*, see: J.S. Furnivall, *Netherlands India: A Study of Plural Economy*, pp. 446 and 449; and: J.S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice*, pp. 303-305.

## Introduction

A recognition of the patterns of *social* interactions between people of different races and ethnicities would naturally lead to a re-thinking of the standard Furnivallian definition of the plural colonial society, resulting in a non-Furnivallian definition of this term: more specifically, an appreciation that a plural colonial society could be characterised by a substantial degree of *social* and *symbolic* integration, as well as economic integration. This re-thinking of the plural society concept thus leads to a rejection of the Furnivallian insistence on social compartmentalisation along racial or ethnic lines, while retaining the plural society concept itself, minus its Furnivallian baggage. Simply put, it may be time to try to understand plural societies *without Furnivall*, by rescuing the concept of the plural society from the Furnivallian definition, reformulating the concept, and giving it a new and more accurate definition. It is time to take the plural society concept beyond Furnivall.

This reconsideration and critique of Furnivall's classic definition of the plural society – now nearly seventy years old – might seem unimportant or unnecessary, were it not for the fact that the term is still alive and well in the scholarly discourse on colonial societies. For example, recent works on the social history of Singapore have used this term, and cited Furnivall's definition as the authoritative definition.<sup>32</sup> An acceptance of the Furnivallian definition may contribute to a preoccupation with social segregation

---

<sup>32</sup> See the references to the Furnivallian concept of the plural colonial society in: Brenda S.A. Yeoh, *Contesting Space: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment in Colonial Singapore* (1996), p. 2; Grace Loh and Lee Su Yin, *Beyond Silken Robes: Profiles of Selected Chinese Entrepreneurs in Singapore* (1998), p. 24; Chua Beng Huat and Kwok Kian-Woon, "Social Pluralism in Singapore," in: Robert W. Hefner, editor, *The Politics of Multiculturalism: Pluralism and Citizenship in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia* (2001), pp. 87-88; Lai Ah Eng, "Introduction: Beyond Rituals and Riots," in: Lai Ah Eng, editor, *Beyond Rituals and Riots: Ethnic Pluralism and Social Cohesion in Singapore* (2004), p. 4 and endnotes 7 and 8 on p. 35; and: S. Gopinathan, Ho Wah Kam, and Vanithamani Saravanan, "Ethnicity Management and Language Education Policy: Towards a Modified Model of Language Education in Singapore Schools," in: Lai Ah Eng, editor, *Beyond Rituals and Riots: Ethnic Pluralism and Social Cohesion in Singapore* (2004), p. 229.



## *Introduction*

along racial lines, and an assumption that such segregation was imposed by colonialism, as well as a tendency to devote a great deal of attention to the tiny population of European colonial elites, or perhaps to envision the colonial social setting as basically consisting of two completely separate societies: a mass of Asian labourers and an elite class which may be imagined as having been predominantly European. Such an oversimplified view of the colonial past would overlook the important class of wealthy and influential Asian colonial elites, which was evidently far richer and more numerous than the European colonial elite class. In addition, such an oversimplified and racially polarised depiction of the colonial society might overlook the Asians who were neither impoverished labourers nor wealthy businessmen, as well as the non-elite Europeans.

A critique of the Furnivallian concept of the plural society is long overdue. It is time to reconsider the preoccupation with racial segregation, as well as the tendency to give too little attention to the issue of class, and the underestimation or lack of recognition of the crucial role of Asian colonial elites, at least with regard to the colonial era of Singapore. In colonial Singapore, at least, the plural colonial society, while undoubtedly plural, *did* involve non-economic interactions between different sections of the population, contrary to the Furnivallian definition. Of course, this reconsideration of Furnivall's version of the plural society concept may well be relevant to a rethinking of the nature of colonial societies in other places.

Furnivall's classic definition of the plural society, having long been accepted as authoritative (and evidently still so accepted today), serves as a convenient foil for this study, together with the review of popular perceptions of the term *colonialist* as revealed in online sources. But this study is also a response to understandings or impressions of

## *Introduction*

colonialism which I have heard expressed in conversations since I moved to Singapore in 1999. This study endeavours to clear up some misunderstandings or misconceptions about the nature of colonialism which have evidently taken root over the years. It is time to reappraise and more fully appreciate the active role and agency of Asians *within* colonialism, as protagonists and partners, rather than merely passive subjects or confrontational opponents, and to recognise that Asian and European elites were closely *socially* integrated, as well as economically interdependent, within their partnership in their colonial and imperial joint effort; this will complement the exploration of economic cooperation between Asians and Westerners in Singapore in the works of Wong Lin Ken,<sup>33</sup> Chiang Hai Ding,<sup>34</sup> and Carl Trocki.<sup>35</sup> The redefinition of the concept of the plural colonial society will help to provide a better understanding of colonial society, and of colonialism itself, as well as highlighting the leading role that wealthy Asian elites played within colonialism and imperialism.

---

<sup>33</sup> Wong Lin Ken, "Commercial Growth before the Second World War," in: Ernest C.T. Chew and Edwin Lee, editors, *A History of Singapore*, pp. 60 and 62; Wong Lin Ken, "Singapore: Its Growth as an Entrepot Port, 1819-1941," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Volume IX, Number 1 (March 1978), p. 83.

<sup>34</sup> Chiang Hai Ding, *A History of Straits Settlements Foreign Trade 1870-1915*, pp. 5, 8, 9, 30, 49, 53, 58.

<sup>35</sup> Carl A. Trocki, *Opium and Empire*, pp. 161 and 222-223; and: *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control*, pp. 48, 76-77, 104, 182, and 185.

## **Chapter One: Asian Colonial Elites and Empire-Building**

It is clear that the Asian elites of colonial Singapore were at least the equals of their Western fellow elites, in terms of social status, prestige, and wealth. This exploration of the social history of the multiracial elite class in this colonial port city endeavours to appreciate the active role of leading Asians in the colonial system, as elite partners in a multiracial joint venture of empire-building, rather than merely passive subjects, subordinate subalterns and compradors, or proto-nationalists engaged in anti-colonial resistance, conflict, subversion, and struggle. Asian elites were not merely the clients of European patrons; they were, in fact, full partners with their European fellow elites – they were allies together in a colonial joint venture which belonged to the Asian elites as well as to the Europeans. In Singapore, at least, Asian elites were not only the equals of their European partners, but were often superior to them, in terms of possession of wealth and status symbols. An appreciation of the social aspects of the central role of Asian elites as leading actors, stakeholders, and beneficiaries within the colonial system in Singapore complements studies of their economic and political cooperation with Western elites, and contributes towards according these Asians the recognition they deserve as key protagonists in the development of Singapore during its colonial era, from 1819 to 1959. The social and economic success of Asian elites in Singapore and their cooperative interaction with their European fellow elites here was a continuous theme throughout the history of colonial Singapore, and the social aspect of this continuity is the topic of this study.

Asian colonial elites, and their role within colonialism, are often referred to in scholarly works as *collaborators* and *collaboration*, respectively. However, these terms

carry a certain degree of conceptual baggage. *Collaboration* is often understood to be a form of treason against one's own community or nationality, through cooperation with an enemy;<sup>1</sup> and *collaborators* may be understood to have performed an inferior or subordinate role to such an enemy, as their lackeys or running dogs. The terms *collaborator* and *collaboration* presuppose the sense of a national loyalty, identity, and unity, which can be betrayed by collaborators. However, the value-laden understandings of these terms are not necessarily relevant to the colonial period, before the development of modern Asian nationalism.<sup>2</sup> Asian elites in Singapore not only cooperated with their European fellow elites: these Asian elites also served as leaders of their own communities here, which indicates that they were not regarded as traitors by their own communities, and that the Europeans were not generally regarded as the enemy by the local Asian population. The Chinese section of the population of colonial Singapore was divided into five major dialect groups, and there was a significant amount of hostility between different groups of Chinese here; if the Chinese in nineteenth-century Singapore regarded anyone as their enemy, it was likely as not their own fellow Chinese who were members of other dialect groups – indeed, fighting broke out between these groups from time to time.

As to the relative ranking of Asian and European elites in colonial Singapore, the leading Asians were apparently just as wealthy, and sometimes much more wealthy, than the European elites. These Asian elites publicly and conspicuously displayed their

---

<sup>1</sup> Bryna Goodman, "Improvisations on a Semicolonial Theme, or, How to Read a Celebration of Transnational Urban Community," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Volume 59, Number 4 (November 2000), p. 919; Ian Copland, *The Burden of Empire*, p. 87; Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> See: Sir John Seeley, quoted in: Ian Copland, *The Burden of Empire: Perspectives on Imperialism and Colonialism*, p. 47.

possession of material wealth and status symbols, which indicates that the Asian colonial elites were at least the equals of their Western partners in colonialism, rather than their subordinates; that they were fellow members of the colonial elite class, and that they were engaged together in a mutually-beneficial colonial joint venture. In order to avoid any historically inaccurate and imaginary perceptions of the Asian colonial elites as traitors, or as mere lackeys or running dogs, it may be best to avoid the terms *collaborator* and *collaboration* in this study, and focus instead on their cooperative social interactions with European elites in the context of their shared elite status, which placed them together in the centre and apex of the colonial social structure.

### **Cosmopolitan Colonialism by and for a Multiracial Colonial Elite Class**

The exploration of the patterns of social interactions among leading Asians and Europeans in the colonial era, including the ways in which they benefited in terms of social and symbolic capital, is related to the consideration of whether or not what has been called *European* colonialism was truly a *European* project, or whether it was really, at least in Singapore and its Malayan hinterland, a multiracial or *cosmopolitan* endeavour – a joint venture of Asian and European elites. This suggests that the most important social distinction between people in the colonial system here was the difference between elites versus less privileged individuals, rather than the distinctions between members of different racial or ethnic categories; in other words, local Asian elites may well have had more in common socially (as well as politically and economically) with their European fellow elites here than with their less-fortunate racial or ethnic compatriots. The colonial social hierarchy here was thus not a racial hierarchy, but rather an hierarchy of class, status, privilege, and prestige, with high-status elite Asians and Europeans located

together at the top of the social hierarchy, above the masses of less-fortunate Asians, as well as superior to the low-ranking European soldiers and sailors here. While Asian elites were interested in enhancing their status within their own communities through leadership of communally-based organisations and through conspicuously generous charitable activities, they were also at least as much interested in cultivating their social connections with European elites, connections which provided symbolic rewards of status, prestige, and publicity, as well as potentially facilitating lucrative interracial economic cooperation between Asian and European elites.

An appreciation of the central role of Asian elites in the colonial system, and their partnership with their Western fellow elites, suggests that so-called *European* colonialism was actually far more Asian than has, perhaps, been generally recognised. The fact that local Asian colonial elites derived at least as much benefit, symbolically as well as materially, from the colonial system as their Western colleagues, suggests that colonial Singapore belonged at least as much to Asian elites as to Europeans. The term *colonial elite*, at least with regard to Singapore, must be understood to include Asians as well as Europeans, and the colonial system was a joint venture of a multiracial class of colonial elites. An attempt towards an understanding of how these colonial elites managed to work closely together for their mutual benefit under a European flag for fourteen decades, despite their different cultural backgrounds and ethnic identities, requires an exploration not only of their economic and political interactions, but of their social interactions as well. While other works have considered the economic and political dimensions of interactions among Asian and European elites in colonial settings, there has, perhaps, been too little attention given to the social and symbolic dimension. This study of the

social history of the cosmopolitan elite class of colonial Singapore, and more specifically of how Asian and European elites cultivated social connections and created the social capital of shared membership in an elite class or community of prestige by giving each other symbolic capital, aims to develop some understanding of the social context of the economic and political partnerships of empire-builders from the East and the West. Along the way, it aims to rethink the concept of colonialism itself, suggesting that the term *European colonialism* should be treated with scepticism, and that colonialism should be viewed instead as a cosmopolitan venture, with Asian elites playing starring roles.

The focus of this study is on the *social* and *symbolic* manifestations, structures, patterns, and contexts of the colonial system here as a joint venture of Asian and European elites, rather than its political and economic aspects. However, these four dimensions (social, symbolic, economic, and political) likely operated in parallel, and functioned to mutually reinforce and support one another. On the social side, the social connections and networking among Asian and European elites would likely have helped to provide them with resources of acquaintanceships, contacts, and reputability, all of which were potentially essential to their economic and political cooperation for their mutual advantage. Such social connections among Asian and European elites could be created and strengthened by participating together in the same system of status symbols, engaging in activities which benefited all participants in terms of confirming and enhancing their symbolic capital, their social status and prestige. Meanwhile, on the economic and political side, the shared desire of Asian and European elites to work together to gain wealth and to promote political stability within the colonial setting

provided them with reasons to want to get to know one another, to develop some sense of mutual trust, and to keep in touch, coordinating their interests and standing together as a privileged elite social class, a multiracial community of prestige. Indeed, the more that one reflects on the inherent interconnectedness of the social, symbolic, economic, and political dimensions likely to be found in any society, the more untenable seems the Furnivallian contention that the different racial and ethnic sections of a plural society could somehow interact economically, yet still remain socially isolated and compartmentalised. The Furnivallian conception of the plural society is so flawed that it seems remarkable that it was not demolished a long time ago, and replaced with a better understanding of plural societies, an understanding which recognises that plural societies can be characterised by significant degrees of social and symbolic integration, as well as economic interactions.

Elite-level social integration is probably characteristic of all stratified societies, on all continents and in the past as well as the present. Alliances between people with shared or complementary interests can be highly beneficial to the interests of all parties to the alliance. It is only natural for elites to realise that, by closing ranks as a social class, they can promote their shared interests in wealth, privilege, and status. They find that they need one another's help to achieve their individual economic, political, and social goals. Social integration among elites provides the social backdrop or medium for their economic and political cooperation, as they work to further their individual interests by perpetuating the privilege of their class, legitimating their authority, and promoting the compliance of the masses with elite dominance. In addition to what might be seen as the practical concerns with economic and political achievements, elites may naturally wish to



associate with one another to gain prestige for its own sake, by asserting their social centrality, their connection with status symbols, and their membership in the privileged social circle along with their fellow elites. What was perhaps somewhat unusual about the case of colonial Singapore was that the elite class here was multiracial, with so much of the economic power in the hands of Asian elites, while official political authority was in the hands of the European elites, who were evidently outnumbered by the more wealthy Asian elites. Therefore, the social and symbolic integration of this elite class necessarily involved the building of social connections and a symbolic system which transcended ethnic and racial boundaries.

As to just who were the elites in colonial Singapore, it may be difficult – or even impossible – to precisely define the elites as a group, that is, to distinguish which individuals were elites as distinct from the non-elites. Some individuals might seem to be elites by some standards, and yet non-elites by other definitions. This is likely the case in many, if not all, stratified societies, where gradations of status shade into each other along a continuum of social prestige. However, an exploration of social integration among Asians and Europeans at the elite level in colonial Singapore does not require a precise definition of elite membership and relative degrees of elite status, or the identification of each and every elite individual. This study is especially concerned with the *leading* Asian and European elites, whose elite status is clear from the available documentary evidence. These especially high-status elites included prominent merchants, bankers, and property owners, as well as high-ranking colonial government officials and leading professionals. Their social status was confirmed and reaffirmed by their prominent roles in important organisations, celebrations, rituals, and social

functions, which were conspicuously documented and publicised in locally-circulated publications, including local newspapers, annual directories, guidebooks, commemorative histories, and who's who books. These publications not only asserted and publicised the prestige and status of these elites in their own time, demonstrating which institutions, symbols, and rituals were socially important, but also recorded these matters for future historians. The publicity accorded to these elites, the formal honours publicly conferred upon them, the leadership positions they held in important organisations, and their association with one another and with certain prestigious symbols (such as imperial royalty, grand buildings and spaces, and the locally-consecrated name of Raffles) all confirmed their status as the leading local colonial elites, at the summit level of the multiracial colonial society here, and displayed the multiracial character of this elite social class.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Multiracial Elite Centre of the Plural Colonial Society**

Asian and European elites alike endeavoured to belong to the elite *centre*<sup>4</sup> of society in colonial Singapore, to publicly assert their membership and prominence within this centre, and to be recognised as elites by the general public, as well as by their fellow Asian and European elites. This centre was a social structure which provided the multiracial community of elites with a focal point and a sense of unity or *centricity*: these elites cooperated to create a central symbolic system and invest its symbols with social meaning by *pooling* their social and symbolic resources; and this system distributed

---

<sup>3</sup> Regarding the identification of elites by finding their names in the written record, see: Lea E. Williams, "Chinese Leadership in Early British Singapore," *Asian Studies*, Vol. II, Number 2, August 1964, p. 177, and: Carl T. Smith, *Chinese Christians: Élités, Middlemen, and the Church in Hong Kong*, pp. 104-105.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*, pp. 39, 97, and 3-16; Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*, pp. 13, 102, 109, 120, 124, 132; Clifford Geertz, "Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power," in: *Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual, and Politics Since the Middle Ages*, edited by Sean Wilentz, pp. 14-16.

symbolic and social benefits to each of these elites.<sup>5</sup> Their mutual interest in confirming and enhancing their social status and prestige encouraged these elites to engage together in institutionalised patterns of elite-level multiracial social interaction within prestigious organisations and during public celebrations, rituals, and social events. These activities created and reaffirmed prestigious imagery and symbolic capital, which the elites exchanged amongst themselves by honouring each other through participation, association, and inclusion in organisations, rituals, and publicity, and by the award of formal titles and honours and the bestowal of public praise upon one another. The *social exchange* of symbolic capital among Asian and European elites fostered the creation of social connections among them, which bridged their cultural differences and linked them together as fellow members of the colonial elite class.<sup>6</sup> Asian elites and European elites were interdependent partners, stakeholders, and beneficiaries together in the colonial system here, socially and symbolically as well as economically and politically. The cooperative and mutually-beneficial partnership between elites of different races and their social exchange of symbolic resources promoted the social bonds which formed overarching connections at the elite level, bridging racial and cultural divisions within this culturally diverse society, and providing a substantial element of social continuity and stability during the growth and development of this colonial port city.

---

<sup>5</sup> On the concepts of *centricity* and *pooling*, see: Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, pp. 188-190.

<sup>6</sup> Regarding the concept of *social exchange*, see: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter XI, seventh paragraph; Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, pp. 387 and 389; Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, p. 175; Marcel Mauss, *The Gift (Essai sur le don)*, p. 10 and 11; Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship (Les Structures Élémentaires de la Parenté)*, pp. 59-60 and 68; Peter M. Blau, *Exchange and Power in Social Life*, pp. 4, 89, 92, and 107; Alvin W. Gouldner, "The Norm of Reciprocity: A Preliminary Statement," *American Sociological Review*, Volume 25, Number 2 (April 1960), pp. 161-178; William J. Goode, *The Celebration of Heroes: Prestige as a Social Control System*, pp. x, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 26, 31, 33, 40, 41, and 42-43; Peter P. Ekeh, *Social Exchange Theory: The Two Traditions*; and: Pierre Bourdieu, "The Economy of Symbolic Goods," in: *Practical Reason*, pp. 100 and 104.

One prominent example of a leading Asian elite who engaged in the social exchange of symbolic capital within the colonial system was Tan Kah Kee, a wealthy businessman, philanthropist, and Nanyang Chinese leader, whose accomplishments have been chronicled in the excellent biography by C.F. Yong, entitled *Tan Kah-kee: The Making of an Overseas Chinese Legend*. In 1916, the colonial government approved Tan Kah Kee's application to be naturalised as a British subject; C.F. Yong explained that naturalisation was regarded as an honour.<sup>7</sup> The colonial authorities granted Tan Kah Kee the title of *Justice of the Peace* in 1918.<sup>8</sup> Tan Kah Kee accepted appointment to a seat on the prestigious Chinese Advisory Board in 1923, and served in this capacity until 1933.<sup>9</sup> He was thereby formally incorporated into the colonial political structure. The names of the Members of the Chinese Advisory Board, as well as the names of the Justices of the Peace, were published each year in the annual local directories.

By accepting these appointments, Tan Kah Kee contributed to the legitimacy and prestige of the colonial system and its institutions. This was an example of a social exchange of symbolic capital: the authority of the colonial system was enhanced by Tan Kah Kee's endorsement, while these appointments contributed to Tan Kah Kee's social status. Tan Kah Kee donated ten thousand dollars to Raffles College, which began operations in 1928, and his name was carved in stone in a list of donors on a marble tablet at the College, in the Oei Tiong Ham Hall. During the formal opening ceremony for Raffles College in 1929, Governor Sir Hugh Clifford gave a speech in which he mentioned Tan Kah Kee's name and the amount of his donation, and the text of this

---

<sup>7</sup> C.F. Yong, *Tan Kah-kee: The Making of an Overseas Chinese Legend*, p. 120.

<sup>8</sup> C.F. Yong, *Tan Kah-kee*, pp. 120-121.

<sup>9</sup> C.F. Yong, *Tan Kah-kee*, p. 121.

speech was published in the *Straits Times*.<sup>10</sup> This public honour must have further contributed to Tan Kah Kee's reputation. Governor Sir Hugh Clifford, Governor Sir Cecil Clementi, and Lady Clementi each visited Tan Kah Kee's rubber factory, and these visits were publicised in the press, as noted by C.F. Yong, who explained that Tan Kah Kee's prestige was further enhanced by the press reports of these events.<sup>11</sup> According to C.F. Yong, Governor Sir Shenton Thomas recognised Tan Kah Kee as the leader of the Chinese in Singapore by asking him to assume the leadership of the Singapore Chinese Mobilization Council in 1941.<sup>12</sup> This series of honours thus benefited both sides in the exchange, enhancing the symbolic capital of each party to the transaction: Tan Kah Kee gained prestige, while the colonial government gained legitimacy through the acceptance of its honours by a man who was, quite possibly, the most prominent Chinese leader in Singapore before Lee Kuan Yew. Tan Kah Kee was one of many elites who contributed to the pooling of social and symbolic resources in the central social structure of colonial Singapore, and who, in turn, received symbolic benefits from that centre.

The formation of the cosmopolitan elite class of Asians and Europeans was essential to the social history of colonial Singapore, since this influential social class established a degree of elite-level social unity, cohesion, and community, within a multiracial and culturally diverse society. This elite community provided Singapore with an organised social centre, or a sense of *a society* in the colonial era, as opposed to a *plural* society in the classical Furnivallian sense, that is, a number of different societies

---

<sup>10</sup> *Straits Times*, 23 July 1929, in the Raffles Scrapbook, NUS Central Library Rare Books collection, Stack # R4091.

<sup>11</sup> C.F. Yong, *Tan Kah-kee*, p. 59, and p. 80, endnotes 62-64, in which C.F. Yong cited: *Straits Times*, 6 June 1929; *Malay Mail*, 6 March 1930; and *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 9 February 1930.

<sup>12</sup> C.F. Yong, *Tan Kah-kee*, pp. 121 and 352.

coexisting in the same place, economically interacting yet socially segregated;<sup>13</sup> instead, this society was *plural* in the sense of being ethnically diverse, but not in the sense of strict social segregation. The interest in status and prestige, shared by Asian and European elites alike,<sup>14</sup> activated their cooperative social interaction and integration through their participation in the creation and use of the symbols and imagery of traditions, institutions, organisations, rituals, titles, means of publicity, and settings or venues of prestige; the social integration of Asian and European elites paralleled and complemented their mutually profitable economic cooperation. Despite their cultural differences, these elites were brought together socially by their shared interests in prestige and status, and thereby formed a single colonial society, a social space which could include the whole multiracial population, in which Asian and European elites and aspiring elites could recognise the same system of status symbols and prestigious institutions, thus cultivating an overarching institutional and symbolic unity at the summit of the colonial social hierarchy.

---

<sup>13</sup> Regarding J.S. Furnivall's conception of the *plural society*, see: J.S. Furnivall, *Netherlands India: A Study of Plural Economy*, pp. 446 and 449; and: J.S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice*, pp. 303-305.

<sup>14</sup> On the human need for social recognition, status, or prestige, see: Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*, pp. 37-38; William J. Goode, *The Celebration of Heroes: Prestige as a Social Control System*, p. vii; and: Robert W. Fuller, *Somebodies and Nobodies: Overcoming the Abuse of Rank*, pp. 46, 48, 49, and 56. On the psychological need for prestige in the value system of Chinese merchants in colonial Singapore, and the relationship between their display of wealth (including mansions and gardens) to their acquisition of prestige, see: Yen Ching-hwang, "Ch'ing's Sale of Honours and the Chinese Leadership in Singapore and Malaya (1877-1912)," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Volume 1, Number 2 (September 1970), pp. 26-32. Regarding perceptions of honour and prestige among Westerners, see: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, esp. Chapters 10, 11, 13, and 17, pp. 114-124, 143, and 175; see also: John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia*, pp. 77, 170, 171-172, 226, and 227. Regarding *nama*, see: Anthony Milner, *Kerajaan: Malay Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule*, especially pp. xvi, 104, 105, and 106. Regarding *face* or *mien-tzu* (also spelled *mianzi*), see, for example: P. Christopher Earley, *Face, Harmony, and Social Structure: An Analysis of Organizational Behaviour across Cultures*, pp. 36-38, 42-79, and 212-213.

### **The Elite Theatre of Prestige**

The conspicuous and spectacular nature of the elite theatre of prestige – the public rituals and celebrations – displayed the symbolic system to everyone, ensuring that the entire urban population could appreciate the status symbols and institutions of this system. These status symbols and marks of prestige were the prizes available to the winners in the colonial social game. The public display of these symbolic social prizes and the institutions which conferred them, impressed upon ambitious individuals not only the desirability of the prizes, but also the means by which they might attain them – in other words, the rules of the social game. As socially ambitious individuals played by these rules to achieve symbolic prizes (such as honours, titles, and inclusion in elite institutions and rituals), they contributed to the social structure of the elite class, by cultivating connections with other elites and affirming the value of the prizes and the legitimacy of the rules of the social game; thus, they became stakeholders in the system, with vested interests in its continuity, and developed a sense of interconnectedness, shared status, and community with their fellow elites. This was the social mechanism which perpetuated and stabilised the social structure, affirming and sustaining its elite centre.

As ambitious, status-conscious individuals endeavoured to position themselves in this social elite centre, and as they enjoyed the symbolic rewards they found there, they would naturally feel an interest in sustaining and enhancing the prestigious symbols and imagery of this centre, through regular public display and performances in the theatre of prestige. Such display and performances entailed cooperation and social interaction among Asian and European elites, and fostered their sense of shared membership in the

elite community of prestige. These efforts upheld the status value of the elite centre, its symbols, and its institutions, as desirable prizes in the social game, available to be perceived and recognised by the entire population as the apex of the prestige hierarchy and the centre of the diverse society. As Asian and European elites created, shared, and recognised their system of status symbols together, they made and reproduced their class.<sup>15</sup> Anyone who aspired to social prestige and elite status could see what were the rules of the social game, and by following these rules they would perpetuate the social structure, generation after generation. As Asian and European elites played the social game to win symbolic prizes of prestige and status, they reinforced the sense that they were members of the same team in an even larger game – the global game of imperial colonialism, which depended on teamwork among multiracial colonial elites in various settings. The two games were interdependent and mutually supporting, and Asian and European elites won rich material and symbolic prizes by playing these games together, according to the rules which they established and perpetuated. All of these elite players could win prizes, since their cooperation resulted in the creation of status symbols and material wealth, and thus increased the pool of these resources available for distribution among all of the elite participants.

So long as the community of prestige was open to the incorporation of new elites through recognition of the achieved status of new members who knew how to play by the rules of the social game and win its social and symbolic prizes, such a system would tend to attract and assimilate individuals with ambition and social skills. Therefore, these

---

<sup>15</sup> See: Pierre Bourdieu, “Social Space and Symbolic Power,” in: *Sociological Theory*, Volume 7, Number 1 (Spring 1989), p. 23; Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, p. 135; and: Pierre Bourdieu, “What Makes a Social Class? On The Theoretical and Practical Existence Of Groups,” in: *Berkeley Journal of Sociology: A Critical Review*, Volume XXXII, 1987, p. 15.



potential leaders would become stakeholders and supporters of the colonial establishment, rather than forming rival networks or organisations. The openness of the elite class to new members thus strengthened this class, while tending to reduce the possibility of organised opposition or challenges to the *status quo*, by reducing the availability of potential leaders outside of the colonial establishment and its community of prestige.<sup>16</sup> Having been accepted into the elite class, individuals would be disinclined to criticise or turn against their fellow elites, or mobilise opposition, since they had so much to lose, economically and politically, as well as socially and symbolically. Of course, it would have been highly unlikely for any elites to rebel against the colonial system and its social structure, since the economic, political, and social interests of Asian and European elites in colonial-era Singapore made them natural allies and partners in the development of Singapore and its Malayan hinterland.

The members of the cosmopolitan elite class made up only a fraction of the population of colonial Singapore, yet their importance in providing a centre or focal point for their society was far greater than what their numbers would suggest. Like the stitches in the seams of a garment, which make up merely a fraction of the total material yet hold all of the pieces together, the Asian and European elites accounted for only a minority of the social fabric here, yet they were an essential component of that fabric, linking together different sections and contributing to the continuity of the overarching social structure. While the society of colonial Singapore as a whole was certainly not entirely harmonious, the cosmopolitan elite class did provide at least some degree of unifying social structure and continuity, despite the significant degree of cultural diversity and income disparities which characterised the population, and the social tensions which

---

<sup>16</sup> Compare with Hong Kong, as described in: Lau Siu-kai, *Society and Politics in Hong Kong*, p. 15.

erupted from time to time in instances of rioting or street-battles between different groups. The social history of this culturally diverse and multiracial elite class deserves special attention within the social history of Singapore, due to its importance within the larger society – indeed, the sense that there *was* a larger society, rather than several different societies, was largely due to the activities and institutions of the multiracial elite class.

### **Social Integration and Cohesion Among Asian and European Elites**

The nature of the social integration and cohesion of this cosmopolitan elite class may be explored through the evidence of social interaction among Asian and European elites, and of the types of opportunities or appropriate contexts available for such interaction, as well as for forming acquaintanceships and demonstrating their mutual recognition of elite status and fellow membership in the community of prestige – the recognitions of shared status and ties of acquaintanceship which transcended the cultural differences between these elites. Asian and European elites clearly shared interests in symbolic capital; as they cooperated in creating forms of symbolic capital and distributing this capital amongst themselves through social interaction, they thereby cultivated the social capital, of networks composed of ties of acquaintanceship,<sup>17</sup> which bridged their cultural differences and socially integrated their class as a cohesive multiracial community of prestige at the centre of the colonial society.

---

<sup>17</sup> Elites could form bridging social ties amongst themselves that might be described as *acquaintanceships*, or what Mark Granovetter calls *weak ties*, without necessarily forming close friendships, or *strong ties*. Regarding the formation of acquaintanceships in organisational contexts, see: Mark S. Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties,” in: *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 78, No. 6 (May 1973), p. 1375, and: “The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited,” in: *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 1 (1983), p. 229. On the relationship between interaction and social ties, see: Granovetter (1973), p. 1362; see also: Peter M. Blau, *Exchange and Power in Social Life*, pp. 4, 89, 92, and 107. C. Wright Mills pointed out that the unity of the American power elite was not based mainly on friendships, and that the elites did not need to personally know one another; see: C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, p. 287.

The fact that this study deals with a community of elites which existed in the colonial past poses certain problems with regard to the definition and measurement of the social integration and cohesion of the multiracial elite class. If the subject of this study was a present-day community, a sociologist could attempt to assess its cohesiveness by interviewing a sample of its membership, or asking them to fill out a questionnaire. The respondents could be asked to provide information on their social networks, the frequency of their social contacts, and the importance they attach to social interactions with other members of their class. The data compiled from the answers supplied by the respondents to the interviews or questionnaires could be analysed by the sociologist, who could draw conclusions about the degree of social cohesion (if any) among the respondents.<sup>18</sup> Alternatively, a social anthropologist could gather data on social cohesion among an elite class through participant observation, by getting acquainted with a sample of informants and then accompanying them in their social activities, while noting the identities of the people with whom the informants socialise, and the frequency and intensity of such social interaction. The data supplied by such fieldwork could be supplemented by further information gleaned from interviews of selected informants.<sup>19</sup> Such anthropological and sociological fieldwork could reveal information on the amount of social distance between informants – that is, how far apart or close together they are from one another in social space. Data from interviews of informants and questionnaires answered by respondents could also supply information on the subjective evaluations of the relative prestige and status of individuals as perceived by other members of their

---

<sup>18</sup> Stanley Schachter, “Cohesion, Social,” in: David L. Sills, editor, *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Volume 2, pp. 542.

<sup>19</sup> Bernard S. Cohn, “History and Anthropology: The State of Play,” in: Bernard S. Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays*, pp. 47-48.

class.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, these research methods are unavailable to social historians who deal with the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, since the subjects of such research are now deceased.

While social historians may be unable to resort to the use of interviews of informants, sociometric questionnaires, and participant observation fieldwork to gather data on social cohesion and integration in the past that is beyond living memory, social historians may find evidence for some degree of social cohesion among elites by exploring the documentary record of elite-level gatherings, institutions, and rituals. Fortunately for the historian, these elite social events and activities were publicised in the local newspapers and other publications – indeed, it is likely that part of the reason why elites chose to take part in these activities and institutions was for the sake of the publicity that it brought them, since prestige and status need to be socially *perceived* in order to be socially *real*. These records reveal that Asian and European elites devoted a great deal of time and effort to organising and attending celebrations, rituals, meetings, and social functions. The fact that busy merchants would take time away from their money-making activities to attend various gatherings and rituals indicates that they felt that it was important to associate with their fellow elites, and, probably, for others to know about these associations. We can imagine that it would require a strong motivation to pull a successful businessman away from his office or godown to spend hours attending a public ritual, or sitting through a tiresome meeting of a public body, such as an Advisory Board, the Municipal Commission, or the Legislative Council (as illustrated by the charming story the Honourable Legislative Councillor Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa

---

<sup>20</sup> Bryan S. Turner, *Status*, pp. 4-5.

using the scent of Chinese peppermint to keep himself awake during Legislative Council meetings).<sup>21</sup>

Evidence of elite-level interracial and interethnic social interactions and prestigious contexts may be found in contemporary accounts of the meetings, public ceremonies, imperial celebrations, social gatherings, and sporting events which were attended by Asian and European elites, as well as contemporary records of the membership or leadership of public and private bodies to which Asian and European elites belonged – for example, the Grand Jury, the Municipal Commission, the Legislative Council, the Advisory Boards, boards of directors of companies, the lists of officers or members of management committees of clubs and other important organisations, and committees formed for specific public events and charitable activities. The patterns of connections and acquaintanceships within the multiracial elite class may be reasonably inferred from the extent records of their meetings and interactions in prestigious social events and public celebrations, and in their membership together in the Legislative Council, the Municipal Commission, and various other boards and committees listed above, all of which were publicised at the time in local publications, such as local newspapers and annual local directories.

We can gain some sense of the importance that these elites attached to holding such offices and appointments by considering the amount of time they devoted to attending various meetings. We can only imagine how tedious these meetings must have been, although this fact is hinted at in the anecdote of Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa and his Chinese peppermint. It seems reasonable to conclude that Asian and European elites put up with the nuisance of spending innumerable hours attending boring meetings at least in

---

<sup>21</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 55.

part because this was the duty attached to holding the respected offices and appointments which enhanced and confirmed their prestigious status as members of the elite class, as well as providing them with regular opportunities to network with their fellow elites.

The central dynamic of the social and symbolic integration of the multiracial elite class was the eagerness of Asian and European elites to participate together in the institutions, the rituals, and the system of status symbols at the heart of their community of prestige, an eagerness which resulted from their shared ambitions and cravings for the confirmation and enhancement of their symbolic capital of status and prestige. The fact that membership in the elite class and association with its symbols (including its rituals and institutions) conferred additional symbolic capital upon Asian and Western elites alike, made membership in this class attractive to these elites, and encouraged them to participate in its activities. The prestige of membership in the elite class was a social magnet, which attracted ambitious individuals. The members of the multiracial elite community gained symbolic capital by associating and cooperatively interacting with one another, which motivated them to continue their association and interaction.<sup>22</sup> In order to enjoy the symbolic and social benefits of playing the game of status and prestige, they needed each other as fellow players. Since all of the elite players of this game could enjoy its benefits – and there were enough prizes to go around – there was every reason for these players to keep playing, and for new generations of elites to join in the game as the years went by.

Prestigious local organisations were important to elite-level social integration not so much because of the business or public responsibilities which they carried out, but

---

<sup>22</sup> Leon Festinger, "A Theory of Social Comparison Processes," *Human Relations*, Vol. VII, No. 2 (May 1954), p. 135.

rather because of their social and symbolic functions: they fostered elite-level social capital by providing Asian and European elites with periodic opportunities to initiate and strengthen acquaintanceships and connections,<sup>23</sup> and these institutions also helped elites to publicly confirm their status as fellow members of the local elite class by publicising their organisational titles and rankings. It was a clear mark of elite status for individuals to serve as members of boards of directors and other prestigious committees, or to hold office as the presidents and other leaders of prestigious organisations, such as associations and clubs. These organisational status markers provided a means of public recognition of social rank and prestige, serving at the local colonial level much the same social function as the conferral of knighthoods and titles of nobility served at an empire-wide level: they indicated which individuals belonged to the prestigious centre of society.

The meetings and social interactions of Asian and European elites were publicised and chronicled in the contemporary local newspapers and in the annual local directories. The first local directory appeared in 1846; this directory is still available for consultation today, together with annual local directories for most of the following years of the colonial era.<sup>24</sup> The history of local English-language newspapers began with the appearance of the *Singapore Chronicle* in 1824, while the first local Chinese-language newspaper, the *Lat Pau*, was launched in 1881. Local English-language newspapers are available for reference from 1827 onwards, while local Chinese-language newspapers are available from 1887 onwards. Additional information on local elite social history is

---

<sup>23</sup> See William Rowe's discussion of how an urban community in a Chinese city was integrated through the formation of institutions, in: William T. Rowe, *Hankow: Conflict and Community in a Chinese City, 1796-1895* (1989), especially pp. 8-9, 91, and 347.

<sup>24</sup> I am grateful to Clement Liew for introducing me to the microfilm collection of the Central Library of the National University of Singapore in 1999.

found in contemporary guidebooks and first-hand accounts, and in local narrative histories, commemorative publications, and who's who books. Local newspapers and other publications placed Asian and European elites symbolically *on the same page*, so to speak, publicly asserting and confirming their location in the same region of *social space*,<sup>25</sup> at the centre and focal point of the colonial society here. These documentary assertions of elite status and membership in the local elite class, published in Chinese-language and English-language local newspapers, as well as in local directories and other reference books, publicised the membership of the multiracial elite class to the literate section of the population, a section which naturally included many, if not most, of the elites and those who aspired to elite status.

### **Public Representation of the Symbols and Imagery of Prestige and Status**

This study is concerned with public representation of the symbols and imagery of prestige and status – with how Asian and European elites created their multiracial social elite class as they collectively represented their social structure, institutions, and symbols among themselves, as well as to the general public.<sup>26</sup> More specifically, this study explores how Asian and European elites created and represented – or, created by means of representation – the symbols of prestige or forms of symbolic capital which they distributed, conferred, and exchanged among themselves, thereby transcending their cultural differences by socially integrating their cosmopolitan class as a community of

---

<sup>25</sup> Regarding the concept of *social space*, see: Pierre Bourdieu, “The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups,” *Theory and Society*, Vol. 14, No. 6 (November 1985), pp. 723-744; Pierre Bourdieu, “What Makes a Social Class? On The Theoretical and Practical Existence Of Groups,” in: *Berkeley Journal of Sociology: A Critical Review*, Volume XXXII, 1987, Department of Sociology, University of California, Berkeley, p. 7; Pierre Bourdieu, “Social Space and Symbolic Space,” in: Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*, pp. 1-13; Pierre Bourdieu, “Social Space and Symbolic Power,” in: *Sociological Theory*, Volume 7, Number 1 (Spring 1989), pp. 14-25; and: David Swartz, *Culture & Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*, pp. 146 and 153-154.

<sup>26</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, “What Makes a Social Class? On The Theoretical and Practical Existence Of Groups,” in: *Berkeley Journal of Sociology: A Critical Review*, Volume XXXII, 1987, pp. 1-17, esp. pp. 13-16.



prestige. Symbolic capital and social class belong to the realm of reputation, perception, recognition, and representation;<sup>27</sup> status and prestige are only socially real when they are made conspicuous, acknowledged, and appreciated by people within a particular social context. The success of the members of the multiracial elite class in cooperating in the public representation of these symbolic commodities endowed these forms of symbolic capital – the prestigious titles and memberships, the designations and distinctions of honour, status, and recognition – with social reality, validity, and meaning, and, hence, enriched them with exchange value and the capability to initiate and enhance social connections among the elites who took part in the exchanges.

The public representation of the prestige of the cosmopolitan elite class and its centrality within the local colonial society – by means of gatherings and celebrations, lifestyle and sports, buildings and monuments, and the publication of newspapers and books – fostered the social integration of the members of this class by asserting that they all belonged to the same locale in social space, and by indicating that they could further enhance their symbolic capital through continued association and cooperation with one another. The public representation of the elite class promoted cohesion within this class by providing Asian and European elites with a shared set of elite status symbols, and by showcasing the desirability and prestige value of belonging to this multiracial community of prestige, taking part in its activities and institutions, and associating with its range of prestigious symbols. Thus, not only were Asian and European elites motivated to

---

<sup>27</sup> Regarding *symbolic capital*, see: Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, p. 108; Bourdieu, “Rethinking the State” and “The Economy of Symbolic Goods,” in: Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*, pp. 47 and 102; and: Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, pp. 22 and 53. See also the discussion of the term *prestige-symbol* in: Lyman Bryson, “Circles of Prestige,” Chapter V in: Lyman Bryson, Louis Finkelstein, Hudson Hoagland, and R.M. MacIver, editors, *Symbols and Society: Fourteenth Symposium of the Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion*, pp. 79-101.

continue to associate with their fellow members of the multiracial elite class and to identify themselves with its institutions and symbols while supporting and enhancing them; but, moreover, ambitious individuals who aspired to achieve elite status were motivated to strive to join this community of prestige by associating with its members and symbols and taking part in its activities and rituals.

This focus on collective representations and social reality involves an emphasis on the public front-stage of the social history of colonial Singapore, unlike the traditional concern of political history with the backstage or behind-the-scenes strategies of decision-makers. For this social historical approach, what *really* happened was what was *conspicuous* – what the Asian and European elites deliberately made known and visible to the public, rather than what was hidden from view. The concern here is not with revealing formerly confidential official documents, but rather with exploring the social significance of some of the most publicly visible aspects of the colonial past: spectacular imperial celebrations in the streets and on the Padang, social functions at Government House, sporting competitions, buildings and monuments, and publications such as annual directories, guidebooks, travellers' accounts, who's who books, commemorative history books, and especially the local Chinese-language and English-language newspapers.

Naturally, a precise measurement of relative degrees of perceived conspicuousness or publicity in the colonial past is probably impossible; suffice it to say that social activities or events which were attended by large numbers of elites, or witnessed by crowds of spectators, or reported in the newspapers, may be considered to have been socially conspicuous and included in the public knowledge of at least a section of the local population, especially of the more well-informed segment of the public with

which elites were likely to be most concerned. It is reasonable to suspect that elites were more interested in impressing their own peers (that is, their fellow elites), than with impressing the masses, although they would probably have wanted to impress both categories if possible.

It may be fair to say that, for the Asian and European members of the elite class, their fellow elites were an important reference group, and the Chinese-language and English-language local newspapers served to convey information for evaluation – for example, informing fellow elites about their involvement in prestigious institutions and public celebrations. We all know that we are judged by the company that we keep; and we care most about the judgements or evaluations made by others whom we consider to be important – in other words, the members of our reference groups, the people with whom we compare ourselves most closely. It is to be expected that elites in the past – like elites in the present – were concerned about how they were perceived and evaluated by the public, and most especially by their own fellow elites, who were the people with whom they were most likely to have compared themselves. For example, it is likely that a wealthy Chinese businessman in colonial Singapore would have been more interested in how his mansion compared with the mansions of other wealthy people (whether Chinese, European, or other identities) than with how it compared with the dwellings of Chinese coolie labourers. In making comparisons of wealth and social status, it would be more meaningful for individual elites to compare themselves with their peers – including fellow elites of different races – rather than trying to compare themselves with individuals of very different social and economic status.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Leon Festinger, “A Theory of Social Comparison Processes,” *Human Relations*, Volume VII, Number 2 (May 1954), pp. 117-140.

Hence, elites (past and present) tend to be very interested in how they present themselves and represent their status and prestige, by such means as the theatrical rituals of public celebrations, as well as the publication of information about themselves in the press, such as reports on their social activities and attendance at elite gatherings. Much of both of these types of public representations are concerned with showing that elites associate and congregate with fellow elites, and are accepted by their peers as fellow members of their class. In the case of colonial Singapore, this means that reports on the public and social activities of Asian and European elites in the local newspapers (especially the English-language and Chinese-language newspapers) provide key insights into the social and symbolic integration of the members of the multiracial colonial elite class as a community of prestige.

The Chinese and English languages were the two most important written languages (or languages *of record*) for the cosmopolitan elite class in colonial Singapore. While many Chinese and European elites here used the Malay language – or a simplified form of Malay – as a *spoken* lingua franca, the main *written* languages of the elites here were Chinese and English. There was probably only one really important Malay elite family in colonial Singapore, the modern ruling dynasty of Johore, and the two Sultans of this dynasty during the colonial era (Sultan Abu Bakar and Sultan Ibrahim) were both English-speaking. This study is especially concerned with the interactions and representations of prestige which were presented to the public and made conspicuous twice – first in the rituals of prestige performed by Asian and European elites, such as meetings, social functions, sporting events, and imperial celebrations, and then publicised a second time in written form in publications, especially the local newspapers and

reference books. Thus, when elites participated in a public celebration, they presented information on their elite status and prestige first to the spectators who watched the celebration, and then secondly to the readers of the newspaper articles which reported on these events. The fact that so much of the news relating to the cooperative activities of Asian and European elites – their institutional interactions, their sporting competitions, their receipt of honours and titles, their rituals and image-building efforts – was reported in the Chinese-language press shows that these multiracial elite-level activities were made known to the Chinese-literate public, and suggests that such activities were apparently of interest to at least some segment of the Chinese-literate section of the Chinese majority here, as well as to Europeans and English-literate Asians.

### **Different Approaches to the Colonial Past**

This study differs in other ways with what might be regarded as more conventional or familiar approaches to the colonial past. This study is not focused on colonial officialdom; the emphasis here is on social history, rather than political, administrative, bureaucratic history. This approach does not disaggregate the colonial society by focusing on a particular racial, cultural, or occupational section of the population, such as the Chinese or the Europeans, the officials or the merchants; instead, it is concerned with the *overarching connections* at the elite level among the Asians and Europeans who were members of different sections of the population. While other accounts have highlighted the theme of change in the colonial era by periodising this era, this study emphasises the theme of *continuity* in the social structures and processes which integrated the Asian and European elites, decade after decade. Rather than focusing on

conflict or resistance, such as dramatic and exceptional incidents of rioting,<sup>29</sup> this study is concerned with the everyday social patterns of *elite-level cooperation* in a society where the masses seem to have compliantly accepted the authority of the multiracial elite, most of the time. Although conflict is likely a theme in all societies, past and present, the ways in which some people find ways to cooperate and avoid conflict amongst themselves to achieve their goals is a more fundamental dynamic in any society, in terms of providing structure, order, and a degree of continuity, as well as dealing with conflict.<sup>30</sup>

While this study deals with organisations in the public and private sectors, it is not an institutional history or an insider account of the history of a particular organisation or set of organisations, such as the colonial bureaucracy, business firms, or Chinese or European chambers of commerce, all of which have been featured in other studies of colonial Singapore. Instead, this study is more concerned with the connections between the organisations and the elites who led them – the inter-institutional linkages and interracial social connections which overarched the different institutions, interlocking them into an institutional system at the centre of society, and sustaining or reproducing the social reality of that centre. The social institutions and other organisations of colonial Singapore, both private-sector and public-sector, tended to belong mainly (if not entirely) to particular racial, ethnic, or occupational sections of the population, since each group

---

<sup>29</sup> On the tendency of historians to focus on the *dramatic* and the *spectacular*, see: Michael A. Aung-Thwin, *Myth and History in the Historiography of Early Burma: Paradigms, Primary Sources, and Prejudices*, p. 92; and: Edward Shils, “The Integration of Society,” in: Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*, p. 83. Edward Shils mentioned the dramatic nature of conflict on p. 83, and the heroic element of conflict on p. 49. See also: Yong Mun Cheong, “Some Thoughts on Modernization and Race Relations in the Political History of Singapore,” in: Yong Mun Cheong, editor, *Asian Traditions and Modernization: Perspectives from Singapore*, p. 70.

<sup>30</sup> Indeed, conflict requires contact between people, and people are put into contact with one another by organizations, which require some degree of cooperation to exist; without cooperation, there would be no organisation and no society, and thus no social conflict. On the paradox of cooperation as a source and cause of conflict, see: Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*, p. 28. See also: Dennis H. Wrong, *The Problem of Order: What Unites and Divides Society*, p. 209.

tended to establish their own institutions. Still, the elites of all groups found ways to make connections amongst themselves as they developed patterns of cooperative interaction in the creation, distribution, and exchange of forms of symbolic capital.

If the elite organisations, often based on cultural and occupational identities, were the bricks which built the elite central social structure, then this study is interested in the mortar of prestige or symbolic capital which held these bricks together, bonding the elites and their organisations into the social structure of a cosmopolitan elite class. The concern here is with social structures, patterns of interactions and public representations, more than biographical accounts of selected individuals. This study is focused on local colonial social history, rather than imperial history – although some observations and conclusions of the exploration of colonial Singapore society may be relevant to the analysis of other colonial settings, the purpose here is to understand certain social processes in the *local* context.

This study aims to explore the ways in which elites of different races and cultures were socially interconnected by means of processes activated<sup>31</sup> by the insatiable craving for prestige, status, honour, recognition, face, and other forms of symbolic capital, which seem to be so characteristic of elites and would-be elites worldwide. Leaders in all fields of endeavour – and those who aspire to join their ranks – often display an intense concern with their reputations or *face*, and an eagerness to gain additional recognition from their peers and from the general public. It may be somewhat unconventional to explore colonial history in terms of its multiracial social integration through the reciprocal exchange of symbolic capital, instead of focusing on more familiar themes, such as

---

<sup>31</sup> Regarding activation, see: Anthony Milner, *Kerajaan*, p. 114. Compare with: Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*, pp. 102, 120, and 123.

political, administrative, economic, or strategic dynamics in colonial history. However, the role of honour, prestige, and status in activating social behaviour and interaction in various social and historical contexts has appeared in the works of Niccolò Machiavelli,<sup>32</sup> Thomas Hobbes,<sup>33</sup> Clifford Geertz,<sup>34</sup> William Goode,<sup>35</sup> John Butcher,<sup>36</sup> Anthony Milner,<sup>37</sup> and David Cannadine,<sup>38</sup> for example; and Pierre Bourdieu employed the concept of *symbolic capital*<sup>39</sup> to describe honour and reputation,<sup>40</sup> which, he explained, are actually forms of power<sup>41</sup> – as Thomas Hobbes also explained, in 1651.<sup>42</sup>

The term *community of prestige* used in this study was inspired by the concept of the *prestige community* from the work of William Goode. However, whereas Goode used the term *prestige community* to refer to sub-groups which detach themselves to some extent from a wider society that may not respect them,<sup>43</sup> this study uses the term *community of prestige* to describe an elite class that is central to the wider society, in a sense which is inspired by the concept of the *exemplary centre* as employed by Clifford

---

<sup>32</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chapters 21 and 22.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapters 10, 11, 13, and 17.

<sup>34</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*, pp. 24, 123, and 133.

<sup>35</sup> William J. Goode, *The Celebration of Heroes: Prestige as a Social Control System*; Goode's concept of the *prestige community* (pp. 209-212) inspired this study's concept of the *community of prestige*. See also the discussion of Goode's ideas in: Bryan S. Turner, *Status*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>36</sup> John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia*, pp. 77, 170-171, and 223-226.

<sup>37</sup> Anthony C. Milner, *Kerajaan: Malay Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule*.

<sup>38</sup> David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*, pp. 18, 21, 85-89, 98, 100, 122.

<sup>39</sup> On symbolic capital, see: Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (originally titled *Le sens pratique*), pp. 118-121; *Outline of a Theory of Practice (Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique, précédé de trois des d'ethnologie kabyle)*, pp. 171-183; *Practical Reason*, pp. 47-51 and 102-104; *In Other Words*, pp. 22, 35, and 93; "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups," in: *Theory and Society*, Vol. 14, No. 6 (November 1985), pp. 724, 731, and 733; and: "Social Space and Symbolic Power," in: *Sociological Theory*, Volume 7, Number 1 (Spring 1989), pp. 17 and 23. See also: David Swartz, *Culture & Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*, pp. 73, 74, and 90-94; and: Richard Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu*, pp. 85, 129, and 159.

<sup>40</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, pp. 118-121; and *In Other Words*, p. 22.

<sup>41</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power," p. 17.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 10.

<sup>43</sup> William J. Goode, *The Celebration of Heroes: Prestige as a Social Control System*, pp. 209-212.



Geertz,<sup>44</sup> and by the concepts of the *centre of society*, the *central zone* and the *central institutional system* found in the work of Edward Shils.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, Howard Schneiderman has noted, in his discussion of the work of E. Digby Baltzell, that upper-class institutions (including clubs and schools) support the formation of the members of this class into a *community*,<sup>46</sup> while Baltzell himself employed the term *class community* to describe the upper class<sup>47</sup> and quoted Max Weber's description of *status groups* as communities.<sup>48</sup> So, the term *community of prestige* as employed in this study may be seen as a hybrid concept, informed or inspired, to some extent at least, by the ideas of Geertz, Shils, Baltzell, and Weber, as well as Goode.

### **The Exemplary Centre of a Plural Colonial Society**

The concept of an exemplary centre of a society is essential to the idea of a society itself. A society is a group of people which may be so large that it is impossible for each member to interact directly with more than a small fraction of the total membership; instead, a society is characterised by the presence of a focal point or centre of attention shared by the members of the whole society.<sup>49</sup> This centre consists of the whole social theatre, with its stage, props, script, and scenery – the institutions, organisations, symbols, values, ideas, traditions, rituals, and spectacular performances – as well as the actors who star in the cast of the performances of this theatre: elites,

---

<sup>44</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*, pp. 13, 109, 120, and 124.

<sup>45</sup> See: Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*, pp. ix, x, xxxii, xxxiii, xxxvii, xxxviii, 3-16, 38, 39, and 97, regarding the concepts of the *centre of society* and the *central institutional system*. See also the discussion of the centre of a society in: Clifford Geertz, "Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power," in: Sean Wilentz, ed., *Rites of Power*, pp. 14 and 15.

<sup>46</sup> Howard G. Schneiderman, "Introduction," in: Baltzell, *The Protestant Establishment Revisited*, p. xx.

<sup>47</sup> E. Digby Baltzell, *The Protestant Establishment Revisited*, pp. 28 and 29.

<sup>48</sup> Baltzell quoted Max Weber in: Baltzell, "Upper Class and Elites," in: E. Digby Baltzell, *The Protestant Establishment Revisited*, p. 26. See: Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, p. 186.

<sup>49</sup> See: Edward Shils, "Society and Societies: The Macrosociological View," in: Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*, p. 37.

royalty, politicians, celebrities,<sup>50</sup> and heroes of all kinds. This centre might also include the identification of enemies, villains, and other threats, including natural disasters and health hazards. The elites and their central institutions define the shared values and goals of a given society, including the challenges and threats collectively faced by that society, and publicise all of these to the general population by means of public rituals and imagery, as well as publications and news media. The centrality of the elites and their organisations to the society at large is constantly asserted through the publicising of their names, activities, opinions, and institutions in reports and listings in a variety of media; in the colonial era, these included publications such as newspapers and magazines, annual directories, who's who books, guidebooks, souvenir programmes, commemorative volumes, chronicles of local history, radio, and newsreels; today, the list of media also includes television and the internet. These media help to create and sustain the social reality of the centre of society and the status of the elites within this prestigious region of social space by placing and keeping their names and ranks in the public consciousness.

The relationship between the centre and the society as a whole is the relationship of the actors and performances on a stage to all of the people in the audience; they are socially united, at least to some degree, so long as they are watching the same play on the same stage.<sup>51</sup> The concentration of privilege and prestige in the elite centre exercises a magnetic activating force, which tends to ensure its perpetuation and social reproduction by attracting and incorporating new elites, ideas, and institutions, and by promoting the

---

<sup>50</sup> Regarding celebrities, see the mention of entertainers in: Edward Shils, "The Stratification System of Mass Society," in: Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*, p. 311.

<sup>51</sup> See: Edward Shils, "The Theory of Mass Society," in: *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*, p. 97; Edward Shils and Michael Young, "The Meaning of the Coronation," *The Sociological Review*, Volume 1, Number 2 (December 1953), p. 74 (also in: Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*, p. 146); see also: Steven Lukes, "Political Ritual and Social Integration," in: Steven Lukes, *Essays in Social Theory*, pp. 59 and 69, and endnotes 66 and 79 on pp. 208 and 209.

integration and solidarity of the centre as a social structure, and of its key players as a cohesive elite class. New organisations are incorporated into the centre as their leaders are recognised and accepted by the established elites. New types of sports, arts, and recreation are patronised and adopted by established elites, and the exponents of these new ideas are recruited into the elite class. Individual elites of particular spheres integrate their class by gaining social acceptance among elites in other spheres; for example, in today's world, sports heroes and fashion models may become celebrities, and may even become television and movie stars. Celebrities of various types, including sports heroes, military heroes, successful entrepreneurs, and television and movie stars, may become politicians, or marry royalty or members of other elite families. The social capital of connections and status which the elites cultivate amongst themselves helps them to act in concert to sustain and perpetuate this social system in which they are all major stakeholders.

In addition to being united by shared interests and a shared sense of stakeholdership in the system, elites may also be united by jointly partaking of the distinctive tastes and appreciations of a refined high culture, as in the case of the French elites as described in the works of Pierre Bourdieu. However, this was not the case for the cosmopolitan elite class of colonial Singapore, whose Asian and European membership was divided by racial, cultural, and linguistic differences. Moreover, certain elements of the self-images of the cultures of these Asian and European elites posed challenges for the integration of their cosmopolitan elite class here. Both the Westerners and the Chinese, for example, belonged to cultures which were very proud of their own traditions and identities, and this pride could take the extreme form of ethnocentrism.

Europeans and Chinese alike tended to see their own cultures as the best in the world; many Westerners believed that other civilisations were less advanced than their own, while many Chinese believed that non-Chinese were culturally-inferior barbarians.<sup>52</sup> It is probably normal for people to view their own societies and cultures positively.<sup>53</sup> Both Chinese and Europeans belonged to cultures which saw themselves as the centre of the world – yet the Chinese and European elites in colonial Singapore still managed to build social bridges among themselves, so that they could share the same centre of the colonial society here. This study is concerned with how these elites managed to overcome their cultural differences and socially integrate themselves into a cohesive elite class over the course of the colonial era. The multiracial community of prestige organised the society of colonial Singapore, and gave it a centre.

The elite cultivation of the prestige of their institutions and the representation of the location of their class at the centre of the colonial society increased the prestige value of membership in that class and leadership in its institutions as forms of symbolic capital. The more that the symbolic capital of the centre was enhanced, the more strongly were potential elites attracted towards the centre, and the more strongly were all elites and potential elites motivated to cooperate closely to protect their shared material and symbolic interests. Thus, the Asian and European elites tended to become cohesive as a

---

<sup>52</sup> Regarding traditional Chinese views of non-Chinese as *barbarians*, see, for example: Wang Gungwu, "Early Ming Relations with Southeast Asia: A Background Essay," in: Wang Gungwu, *Community and Nation: China, Southeast Asia and Australia*, pp. 77-107; Sophia Chen Zen, "China's Changing Culture," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 4, No. 12, (December 1931), p. 1072; J.K. Fairbank and S.Y. Têng, "On the Ch'ing Tributary System," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* Vol. 6, No. 2 (June 1941), pp. 135-246; J.K. Fairbank, "Tributary Trade and China's Relations with the West," *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (February 1942), pp. 129-149; Immanuel C.Y. Hsü, "The Secret Mission of the Lord Amherst on the China Coast, 1832," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1/2 (June 1954), pp. 242 and 245-247. See also: John Drysdale's account of the conversation between Malcolm MacDonald and Zhou Enlai, regarding *barbarians*, in: John Drysdale, *Singapore: Struggle for Success*, pp. 59-60; and: Low Ngiong Ing, *Recollections: Chinese Jetsam on a Tropic Shore When Singapore was Syonan-to*, p. 20 and 65-66.

<sup>53</sup> Signe Howell and Roy Willis, editors, *Societies at Peace*, pp. 9-10 and 23.

class and to stay that way over the years, recruiting and integrating new members from succeeding generations, institutionalising and perpetuating their integration by developing organisations, rituals, and traditions which they shared and which thus reduced the social distance between them. Their activities elevated their status and organised their society, with their class always firmly positioned in the centre.

### **The Complementarity of Social-Historical and Other Approaches**

A social-historical exploration of the multiracial core of colonial society with reference to sociological concepts may complement other works which have considered the economic and political dimensions. During the colonial era, Dr. Lim Boon Keng took note of interracial cooperation and mutual benefit;<sup>54</sup> references to the participation of Asians, especially Chinese, in the Malayan economy, and to the enjoyment of the rewards of this participation by Asians and Europeans, appeared in the works of Sir Hugh Clifford,<sup>55</sup> Sir Frank Swettenham,<sup>56</sup> Sir Richard Winstedt,<sup>57</sup> and Sir George Maxwell.<sup>58</sup> Over the years, historians have dealt with the cooperative relationships between Asian and European elites in colonial Singapore; this topic has been addressed in the works of Chiang Hai Ding,<sup>59</sup> Edwin Lee,<sup>60</sup> K.G. Tregonning,<sup>61</sup> Carl Trocki,<sup>62</sup> C.M. Turnbull,<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Lim Boon Keng, "The Chinese in Malaya," in: W. Feldwick, editor-in-chief, *Present Day Impressions of the Far East and Prominent and Progressive Chinese at Home and Abroad* (1917), pp. 878, 880, and 882; and: Lim Boon Keng, "Race and Empire with special reference to British Malaya," in: Lim Boon Keng, *The Great War from The Confucian Point of View* (1917), p. 115.

<sup>55</sup> Sir Hugh Clifford, "A Lesson from the Malay States," in: *The Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 84, No. 505 (November 1899), pp. 592, 595, 596, and 599.

<sup>56</sup> Sir Frank Swettenham, *British Malaya: An Account of the Origin and Progress of British Influence in Malaya* (originally published in 1906; seventh impression in 1955), pp. vii, xvi, 231-233, 246, 293, 301-302, and 351.

<sup>57</sup> Sir Richard Winstedt, *Malaya: The Straits Settlements and the Federated and Unfederated Malay States* (1923), pp. 73 and 121.

<sup>58</sup> Sir George Maxwell, "The Mixed Communities of Malaya," in: *British Malaya*, February 1943, p. 116.

<sup>59</sup> Chiang Hai Ding, *A History of Straits Settlements Foreign Trade 1870-1915*, pp. 5, 8, 9, 30, 49, 53, 58.

<sup>60</sup> Edwin Lee, *The British As Rulers: Governing Multiracial Singapore 1867-1914*, pp. 135, 273, and 287-291.

<sup>61</sup> K.G. Tregonning, *Home Port Singapore: A History of Straits Steamship Company Limited*, p. 6.

Wang Gungwu,<sup>64</sup> Lea Williams,<sup>65</sup> Wong Lin Ken,<sup>66</sup> Yen Ching-Hwang,<sup>67</sup> and C.F. Yong.<sup>68</sup> Such interaction has been discussed largely in terms of the economic and / or political aspects of interracial elite cooperation. A social-historical approach to the colonial elite may complement the work of these historians by enabling the perception of important elite-level interaction outside the economic and political realms – namely, the patterns of social connections which formed the context or medium for economic and political partnership between elites with different cultural backgrounds and identities; this approach reveals the cosmopolitan elite class as a community of *prestige* rather than merely a *plural society*, an aggregate of different *cultural* communities who just did business with each other, as described by J.S. Furnivall.<sup>69</sup>

Moreover, the social history of the elite class reveals elements of social continuity and stability which persisted throughout the colonial era, even as the island experienced remarkable economic development and population growth, as well as certain political changes.<sup>70</sup> This study of social linkages and structures built on exchanges of prestige within the multiracial elite class may complement other works which have considered economic and / or political cooperation between Asian and European elites, or which

---

<sup>62</sup> Carl A. Trocki, *Opium and Empire*, pp. 161 and 222-223; and: *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control*, pp. 48, 76-77, 104, 182, and 185.

<sup>63</sup> C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*, pp. 39, 40, and 92.

<sup>64</sup> Wang Gungwu, “The Chinese as Immigrants and Settlers: Singapore,” and “The Culture of Chinese Merchants,” in: Wang Gungwu, *China and the Chinese Overseas*, pp. 166, 167, 169, 171, and 193-194.

<sup>65</sup> Lea E. Williams, “Chinese Leadership in Early British Singapore,” *Asian Studies*, Volume II, Number 2, August 1964, pp. 170-179.

<sup>66</sup> Wong Lin Ken, “Commercial Growth before the Second World War,” in: Ernest C.T. Chew and Edwin Lee, editors, *A History of Singapore*, pp. 60 and 62; Wong Lin Ken, “Singapore: Its Growth as an Entrepot Port, 1819-1941,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Volume IX, Number 1 (March 1978), p. 83.

<sup>67</sup> Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>68</sup> C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, pp. 13-14, 15, 18, 289, 293, 294, 304, and 305.

<sup>69</sup> Regarding J.S. Furnivall’s conception of the *plural society*, see: J.S. Furnivall, *Netherlands India: A Study of Plural Economy*, pp. 446 and 449; and: J.S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice*, pp. 303-305.

<sup>70</sup> Carl Trocki is also interested in continuities; see: Carl A. Trocki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control*, pp. 3, 75, 77, 109, 131, 181, and 185.

have considered the interest in prestige among the elites within a particular ethnic or racial group.

The history of the multiracial elite class, or community of prestige, in colonial Singapore is interesting in a sociological sense, because it does not conform to the standard image of an elite social class or status group. In this standard image, the typical status group is unified as a group and distinguished from non-members largely (if not mostly) by cultural markers of elite status, exclusiveness, and identity.<sup>71</sup> However, the elite status community of colonial Singapore did not conform to this image, since the elite social class here was culturally plural and diverse. The members of this class belonged to several cultural identities. Most of the elites were Chinese, including the speakers of several different Chinese dialects, as well as Peranakan Chinese who spoke Baba Malay. There were also Arab, Armenian, Eurasian, European, Indian, Jewish, Malay, and Parsi elites. It was impossible for all of these members of the multiracial elite social stratum to be linked together by a shared sense of elite cultural identity, distinction, and exclusiveness, for the simple reason that they did not share a common culture. What they did share was an appreciation of the satisfactions inherent in the acquisition and consumption of symbolic capital, the enjoyment of the symbols of status and prestige, which is typical of elites and ambitious individuals worldwide, regardless of their culture. Thus, their integration as a cohesive elite community took the form of *social* and *symbolic* integration through participation together in a shared system of status symbols, such as rituals, honours, and new traditions, rather than *cultural* integration as members of a class characterised by cultural distinction and exclusiveness.

---

<sup>71</sup> See: Bryan S. Turner, *Status*, pp. 5-8 and 11-12. Bryan Turner discusses the work of Max Weber and Pierre Bourdieu.

Thus, the social history of the culturally-diverse community of prestige in colonial Singapore has implications for studies of societies and social structures throughout the world and across time, by highlighting the importance of non-cultural, social and symbolic aspects of elite integration and cohesion, especially in culturally diverse societies. Social integration through participation in shared systems of status symbols may result in the formation of multiethnic communities at national, regional, or even international levels, which could transcend differences in cultural identities. Moreover, in today's increasingly interconnected and globalised world, the example of Singapore suggests that a global elite class may be integrated as an international community of prestige within a worldwide system of internationally-recognised status symbols.

By applying sociological concepts to the study of the colonial past in Singapore, this study illustrates the social aspect of the colonial system here as the product of a cosmopolitan partnership between elites of different races, activated<sup>72</sup> by their shared appreciation of prestige as much as by the profit motive, and integrated as a multiracial elite class by means of social exchange of symbolic capital rather than by cultural convergence. The striving for recognition, prestige, status, and inclusion in the centre of society – in other words, symbolic capital – activated elite society because social connections between individuals and groups were created and strengthened as they gave and received symbolic capital, and as they cooperated to gain symbolic capital collectively; the social connections thus formed constituted the social capital which was the basis of groups and organisations, as well as the overall society. As people exchanged money or economic capital when they made business contracts, so too did

---

<sup>72</sup> Regarding activation, see: Anthony Milner, *Kerajaan*, p. 114. Compare with: Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*, pp. 102, 120, and 123.



they exchange prestige or symbolic capital when they made social contracts. Asian and European elites in colonial Singapore cultivated social capital or connections by exchanging symbolic capital through associating with one another, including one another in organisations and celebrations, recognising each other as fellow elites, and giving each other honours, such as praise and titles. Since these elites did not share a common culture which could give them a sense of shared identity, it was left to the exchange of symbolic capital to activate their social cohesion as a multiracial elite class. Thus, the absence of overarching and unifying cultural commonalities in this cosmopolitan society highlights the importance of the reciprocal exchange of symbolic capital to social integration.<sup>73</sup>

Asian and European elites recognised one another's status and exchanged symbolic capital by bestowing honours and titles upon one another, and by inviting each other to social functions, as well as by accepting one another as fellow members of organisations and as fellow participants in rituals and public ceremonies, especially in spectacular local celebrations of the imperial Crown and the public memory of Sir Stamford Raffles. By cooperating in the cultivation of the prestige values and symbolism of the Crown and the Raffles heritage, the elites endowed institutions and labels with symbolic capital, investing them with prestige value as important local status symbols which were shared by elites regardless of race or culture. These status symbols served as symbolic goods with which the elites could associate themselves and which they could

---

<sup>73</sup> Regarding the concept of *social exchange*, see: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter XI, seventh paragraph; Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, pp. 387 and 389; Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, p. 175; Marcel Mauss, *The Gift (Essai sur le don)*, p. 10 and 11; Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship (Les Structures Élémentaires de la Parenté)*, pp. 59-60 and 68; Peter M. Blau, *Exchange and Power in Social Life*, pp. 4, 89, 92, and 107; Alvin W. Gouldner, "The Norm of Reciprocity: A Preliminary Statement," *American Sociological Review*, Volume 25, Number 2 (April 1960), pp. 161-178; William J. Goode, *The Celebration of Heroes: Prestige as a Social Control System*, pp. x, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 26, 31, 33, 40, 41, and 42-43; Peter P. Ekeh, *Social Exchange Theory: The Two Traditions*; and: Pierre Bourdieu, "The Economy of Symbolic Goods," in: *Practical Reason*, pp. 100 and 104.

confer upon one another, thereby enhancing their prestige both individually and collectively as a social class, and cultivating social connections among themselves, as well as making their elite status visible and recognisable to one another and to the general public.

By participating in the creation, enhancement, and social exchange of symbolic capital, Asian and European elites alike endorsed the colonial social and political structure and its system of status symbols, a structure which was the central focal point of the colonial society. Thus, Asian and European elites helped to organise and sustain the social structure of colonial Singapore. The mutual recognitions of status and exchanges of prestige reduced the social distance between Asian and European elites, fostered the development of acquaintanceships, and placed them together in the same locale in social space, at the centre of the colonial society.<sup>74</sup> Their cooperation in conspicuous public service and leadership activities, as well as their invention of the local elite traditional heritage connected with Raffles and the staging of spectacular public celebrations, fostered public perceptions (and, hence, the social reality) of the prestige, cohesion, continuity, and social centrality of the multiracial elite class and its institutions and membership. The public assertion of the centrality and collective prestige of this elite class promoted its survival through continual renewal and reproduction by acting as a prestige mechanism or status magnet, attracting the new talent of ambitious Asians and Europeans to seek admission to the inner circles of the elite class and work to perpetuate its institutions, cohesion, social centrality, status symbols, and prestige, and thus to continue the cycle of renewal of the social structure, generation after generation. The

---

<sup>74</sup> On the unifying role of prestige and status among elites, see: C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, p. 88.

social history of this multiracial elite class was characterised by the theme of continuity throughout the colonial era.

This study is more about colonial history than imperial history, since it focuses on what was central to a particular colonial system in a particular place, rather than what was central to an empire. The centre of a particular colony is peripheral to an empire – not only in the geographical or topographical sense, but in social, political, and economic terms as well. While an imperial history may explore empire-wide concerns, which may be seen from the perspective of the imperial metropole, a colonial history can focus on the history of a particular colonial setting. The centre of an empire is clearly located in the imperial metropole, the capital city of the empire, where the central elites and institutions of the empire are concentrated. However, with regard to a colonial system – the sum of the interrelated political, economic, and social systems, structures, and institutions which operated in each colonial setting – the central elites and their institutions are just as likely to be found in the colonies themselves as in the imperial metropole. The elites who were central to the colonial system in Singapore and its Malayan hinterland were based here, at the imperial periphery – as, indeed, the central elites and institutions of all colonies in the past were likely located in their own respective colonial settings.

This study sets out to investigate how such a colonial centre was formed and who formed it, despite the significant ethnic and cultural diversity present in Singapore throughout the colonial era. An exploration of the means, patterns, and institutions through which social connections were created between Asian and European elites, bringing them together in the same region of social space and linking them together as an

elite social class, shows that both Asian and European elites were at the centre of the colonial system here. This study explores the nature of this centre, and how the Asian and European elites cooperated to create and sustain this centre, publicly asserting the social reality of its centrality in relation to the rest of the ethnically diverse society, while building and strengthening the social connections (or social capital) founded upon exchanges of symbolic capital which linked these elites together in this multiethnic community of prestige.

This exploration of the development of a multiracial elite community endeavours to escape the familiar racial and cultural compartments, and to explore the possibility of another way of perceiving – and writing about – the multiracial society of colonial Singapore: seeing this society as racially and culturally diverse, yet socially integrated and centred at the summit level of the cosmopolitan elite, instead of trying to artificially compartmentalise this society into socially isolated and culturally homogenous sections with their own separate histories. The emphasis here is on Asians *and* Europeans, rather than Asians, or Europeans, or Asians *versus* Europeans. This is not to deny the obvious fact that conflict and resistance occurred in colonial Singapore, including occasional outbreaks of violence. Conflict and resistance have probably been present in some measure in all societies, including colonial, pre-colonial, and post-colonial societies; but conflict and resistance were not the main themes in colonial society here, any more than they could be in any society that is not on the verge of collapse. Most of the time in colonial Singapore, Asian and European elites cooperated closely; and most of the time, the masses complied with the authority of these elites. Thus, the colonial society was

characterised more by the themes of elite-level cooperation and mass-level compliance, than by the themes of conflict and resistance.<sup>75</sup>

The colonial system here worked rather well for the Asian and European elites who created and controlled it, providing them with a rich supply of wealth and prestige.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, prestige was arguably the key factor which activated the cooperation and social integration of these elites, despite the differences in their cultural backgrounds. Prestige is a concept without cultural boundaries, in the sense that, while different cultures may recognise different markers or symbols of prestige, the basic idea of prestige is familiar to all cultures, and people can learn to recognise and appreciate the prestige markers or status symbols of another culture very quickly. In fact, people can learn to appreciate the status symbols of another culture much more quickly than they can learn to speak another language. In this sense, the appreciation of prestige and status may be seen as something like an international language, which is clearly comprehended by members of all cultures. Elites everywhere are concerned with *face* – they want to have it, keep it, and gain more of it; and so, in terms of *face*, at least, elites of all cultures have an interest of mutual understanding. For elites of all races, prestige is likely a more fundamental object of desire than even material wealth itself – or, to put it another way, wealthy elites may see the acquisition of tangible riches as a means to enhance their intangible wealth of prestige.

---

<sup>75</sup> Compare with the description of collaboration in Hong Kong, in: John M. Carroll, *Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonialists in Hong Kong*, p. 18.

<sup>76</sup> Regarding the economic and symbolic benefits which Chinese elites in Singapore derived from the colonial system, see: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, p. 18.

### **Buying Symbolic Capital Without Spending a Cent**

Money, or wealth in general, can function with regard to the acquisition of social and political resources by wealthy people, very differently from its function in the everyday transactions of ordinary folks who are not wealthy. When people use money to buy goods and services, they usually have to spend money – this may seem at first glance to be such an obvious fact that it should go without saying; but, there are important exceptions to this rule, at least for the rich. Wealthy people can buy status, respect, deference, influence, and even power itself,<sup>77</sup> *without spending any money*. Wealthy people can acquire social and political resources simply by possessing wealth, so long as other people know that they have it and recognise them as wealthy.<sup>78</sup> Thus, with regard to the political and social realms, wealthy people may employ their wealth without expenditure – they may buy without spending anything – just by letting others know that they are rich. People may treat one differently when they believe that one is wealthy; and it seems likely that many wealthy people find this social fact to be quite gratifying. Naturally, this fact may provide a powerful motive for ambitious people to acquire wealth, and for rich people to strive to become even richer.<sup>79</sup> Whatever their basic motives, many Asian and European elites in colonial Singapore acquired wealth and prestige through their close cooperation with one another, which encouraged these elites to integrate socially as a multiracial elite class.

---

<sup>77</sup> Regarding *riches* as power, see: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter X, p. 114.

<sup>78</sup> Regarding the acquisition of the esteem of others through the display of wealth, see: Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*, Chapter Three, p. 36. On the honourable nature of *conspicuous* wealth, see: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter X, p. 119.

<sup>79</sup> On the relationship between the possession of wealth and the acquisition of social honour, status, etc., see: Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*, Chapters Two and Three, especially pp. 26-34, 36, and 38; and: Christopher D. Carroll, “Why Do the Rich Save So Much?” in: Joel B. Slemrod, editor, *Does Atlas Shrug?*, pp. 465-484.

The role of symbolic capital in the social integration and cohesion of Asian and European elites here was especially important because the other forms of shared identity and bases of community, such as shared nationality, culture, religious faith, language, and educational background, were unavailable as common characteristics to link together all of the members of this cosmopolitan elite class; indeed, these factors, if emphasised, would only have tended to divide the different categories of Asian and European elites into ethnic compartments. These elites belonged to a variety of nationalities and cultures. The religious faiths of the Asian elites included Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism, while the European elites were predominantly Christians. Some Asian elites spoke English, and some European elites spoke Malay, but it seems that few Europeans here learned to speak Chinese.<sup>80</sup> According to George Peet, the Malay language learned by many of the Europeans was often no more than a pidgin Malay.<sup>81</sup> As to educational background, those Asian elites who attended school were educated in prestigious local schools, such as Raffles Institution, Anglo-Chinese School, St. Joseph's Institution, Chinese High School, and Raffles College, and some of them received further education in Europe. Some Chinese immigrants attended school in China before settling in Singapore.<sup>82</sup> Meanwhile, European elites generally shared the educational background of having attended schools in their own homelands.

Even attitudes and values related to money-making did not necessarily provide a basis for shared social class identity and social integration among Asian and European

---

<sup>80</sup> A visitor to Singapore in 1857 claimed that there was no European here at that time who could understand Chinese; and the *Straits Times* reported in 1876 that, at most, only two Europeans in Singapore could speak Chinese; see: Laurence Oliphant, *Narrative of The Earl of Elgin's Mission to China and Japan in the Years 1857, '58, '59*, Volume I, p. 20, and the *Straits Times*, 17 June 1876, p. 1, R0016425.

<sup>81</sup> George Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, pp. 93 and 156-157.

<sup>82</sup> Such as George Lien Ying Chow. See: Lien Ying Chow with Louis Kraar, *From Chinese Villager to Singapore Tycoon: My Life Story*, p. 55.

elites. While Asian and European *business* elites may have shared a similar outlook on moneymaking endeavours,<sup>83</sup> European *official* elites tended to view commercial and industrial endeavours as unsuitable occupations for people of their own background; instead, they gravitated towards careers in government service, high finance, the armed forces, and the clergy.<sup>84</sup> But, whatever their background and identities – Asian or European, entrepreneurial or official, migrant, sojourner, or locally-born, as fellow human beings and fellow elites they all shared an interest in symbolic capital in its various forms – prestige, glory, status, esteem, respect, honour, reputation, and *face* – symbolised by the conferral of titles and distinctions, inclusion in prominent social circles, membership in respectable organisations, and conspicuous participation in the organisation of important public events. The fact that this shared interest in symbolic capital transcended racial boundaries is obvious from the record of the public activities and social interactions of elites of different races in colonial Singapore, especially their performances in the theatre of prestige and the ways in which they represented themselves to the public through their various rituals, institutions, and publications.

These status symbols brought the social prominence of Asian and European elites into public view in the theatre of prestige, and displayed their social proximity to one another in the centre of society, as they participated and interacted conspicuously in rituals and other institutions, and as their names and ranks were published in the English-language and Chinese-language newspapers, as well as the annual local directories and

---

<sup>83</sup> See Goh Keng Swee's Foreword, in: Chan Kwok Bun and Claire Chiang See Ngoh, *Stepping Out: The Making of Chinese Entrepreneurs*, pp. viii-ix. Goh Keng Swee compared the characteristics of Chinese businessmen in Singapore with those of European businessmen as described by Max Weber.

<sup>84</sup> P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion 1688-1914*, pp. 23-39; and: P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Crisis and Deconstruction 1914-1990*, pp. 25, 28, 177, 298, and 299.



other publications. The international *social currency*<sup>85</sup> of symbolic capital, the *lingua franca* of reputation, social prestige, and recognised status, which provides rich nourishment for the ego,<sup>86</sup> self-esteem, pride, dignity, and ambition,<sup>87</sup> brought Asian and European elites together into social proximity at the centre of the colonial society, and combined them into a cohesive elite class, despite their cultural differences. Their activities in various spheres, whether in business endeavours or public service, may be seen as different ways to gain symbolic capital, and thus to enhance their social positions and connections.

People desire to associate with one another in groups and to belong to communities at least in part because of cravings for status and membership, as Robert Nisbet has noted,<sup>88</sup> and it stands to reason that these non-material motivations are especially crucial for those fortunate people whose material needs have already been satisfied. While those of us who are not wealthy may naturally think of wealth in terms of the tangible goods and services we can buy with money, for direct consumption by ourselves and our dependents, it is only reasonable to think that more fortunate

---

<sup>85</sup> Regarding *social currency*, see: P. Christopher Earley, *Face, Harmony, and Social Structure: An Analysis of Organizational Behaviour across Cultures*, pp. 66-67 and 213.

<sup>86</sup> Regarding egoistic motivations and needs, see: Douglas Murray McGregor, "The Human Side of Enterprise," in: Jay M. Shafritz and Albert C. Hyde, editors, *Classics of Public Administration*, Third Edition, 1992, p. 219. (Reprinted from *Management Review*, November 1957.)

<sup>87</sup> On the universal human craving for various forms of prestige or esteem, see: Robert W. Fuller, *Somebodies and Nobodies*, pp. 46, 48, 49, and 56; Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, pp. 37 and 38; William J. Goode, *The Celebration of Heroes*, pp. vii and 6; Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, p. 30; Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter XVII; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (Translated by Donald A. Cress, 1992), p. 67; John Adams, quoted in: C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, p. 90; P. Christopher Earley, *Face, Harmony, and Social Structure: An Analysis of Organizational Behaviour across Cultures*, pp. 37-38; Bernardo A. Huberman, Christoph H. Loch, and Ayse Öncüler, "Status As a Valued Resource," *Social Psychology Quarterly*, Volume 67, Number 1 (March 2004), pp. 103-114; Samuel Haig Jameson, "Principles of Social Interaction," *American Sociological Review*, Volume 10, Number 1 (February 1945), pp. 6-8; A.H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," and: Douglas Murray McGregor, "The Human Side of Enterprise," both in: Jay M. Shafritz and Albert C. Hyde, editors, *Classics of Public Administration*, Third Edition, pp. 129-137 and pp. 217-223 respectively.

<sup>88</sup> Robert A. Nisbet, *Community and Power*, p. 73.

individuals would likely have a somewhat different perspective.<sup>89</sup> Most of us likely see money mainly as a means to obtain the basic material requirements of our lives, especially housing, food, transportation, clothing, and medical care. For the more fortunate individuals, the affluent elites who already have more wealth than they can ever enjoy in the sense of *material* consumption, the acquisition, possession, and expenditure of surplus wealth are ways in which they can enhance and sustain their prestige, as Thorstein Veblen explained in 1899.<sup>90</sup> More recently, Gerhard Lenski noted the *insatiability* of the human appetite for status and respect, deference and reputation, prestige and honour; and Lenski further explained that, since money and what money can purchase can be translated into status, the appetite for services and material things is just as insatiable as the striving for status<sup>91</sup> – in fact, they are really just two forms of the same thing. Of course, these observations are not specific to any particular culture; they apply to humanity in general.

Pride is a basic aspect of human nature. A sense of pride is central to a personal identity, a sense of self or personality. Robert Fuller has compared dignity and recognition to food, and their denial to starvation.<sup>92</sup> The forms of wealth – and all that wealth can buy – can be used or consumed both tangibly and as status symbols; but while the material consumption is limited, the symbolic consumption is potentially endless: it is limited only by the bounds of the ambition and imagination of each individual who

---

<sup>89</sup> See: Christopher D. Carroll, “Why Do the Rich Save So Much?” in: Joel B. Slemrod, editor, *Does Atlas Shrug?*, pp. 465-484.

<sup>90</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*, especially chapters 2-4. See also: Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, pp. 143-147; and: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, p. 110.

<sup>91</sup> Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*, pp. 31, 38, and 135. See also: Dennis H. Wrong, *The Problem of Order: What Unites and Divides Society*, pp. 94, 96, and: John Adams quoted in: C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, p. 90.

<sup>92</sup> Robert W. Fuller, *Somebodies and Nobodies: Overcoming the Abuse of Rank*, pp. 46, 49, and 56. See also John Adams, quoted in: C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, p. 90.

aspires to symbolic wealth, including honours, reputation, and prestige. The concept of *prestige* is closely associated with the realm of imagination and perception: the word *prestige* itself is derived from the Latin word *praestigium*, meaning *illusion*, while another Latin word, *praestringere*, means *to blind*.<sup>93</sup>

The prestige motive is potentially just as powerful a motivating or activating force for elite actions and social interactions as the profit motive – and perhaps even more so, due to the *insatiable* nature of prestige. Even those elites who already seem to have as much prestige as a person could want may still be strongly motivated to continue working to sustain their status level. There is a psychological explanation for why even those elites who are firmly established within the elite class would still devote a significant amount of time and energy to their prestige interactions and strategies with their fellow elite – that is, to successfully continuing to play the social game. William Goode noted that the highest-ranking people in any field of endeavour generally receive much more prestige than those elites in which might be described as the second-ranking tier of achievement. For example, in sports, a gold medallist is likely to be far more celebrated and accorded far more respect and prestige among those interested in this competition than the silver medallist, even if these two competitors are separated by only a tiny measurement of performance, as expressed in terms of seconds or points. As far as prestige is concerned, the winner may be expected to take most, if not all, of the available glory. So, from one contest to another, the second prize and third prize winners are motivated to devote the effort needed to perform slightly better than before and win a higher-ranking which carries with it a much higher amount of prestige, while the gold

---

<sup>93</sup> Kingsley Davis, “A Conceptual Analysis of Stratification,” *American Sociological Review*, Volume 7, Number 3 (June 1942), p. 312, footnote 10. See also: C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, p. 87; and: Sir Harold Nicolson, *The Meaning of Prestige*, p. 7.

medallists are motivated to struggle to continue winning gold medals: the margin of victory is so slight, and the difference in prestige terms is so great, that there is no room for complacency.<sup>94</sup> In the case of social elites, the striving for prestige can take the form of expending time and energy in socialising, attending meetings and functions, organising public celebrations, making charitable donations, and providing community leadership and public service on a voluntary basis.

Just as corporations are concerned with building their brand names, elites tend to be interested in building up their own names, and their families' names. However, while corporations use brand-building as a means to make money, for elites, it is likely more often than not the other way around: for them, building the prestige of their names – or their family names – may be their ultimate goal, and money is merely a means to accomplish that goal. Besides enhancing their symbolic capital through the use and possession of wealth derived from success in business enterprises and professional endeavours, elites can also build their reputations by making social connections with fellow elites and being accepted into their organisations and social circles, and by directing their talents towards public leadership, community service, and charitable activities. All of these processes of symbolic capital enhancement were evident in colonial Singapore, where they helped to socially integrate Asian and European elites and place them in the centre of this society.

Whether the aspiration for symbolic capital, which is especially evident and conspicuous among elites and would-be elites, is actually an innate characteristic of human personality and psychology (as, indeed, it seems to be), or whether it is a value or cultural trait which is inculcated through socialisation, is outside the scope of this study

---

<sup>94</sup> William J. Goode, *The Celebration of Heroes*, pp. 69, 72, 74, 81, and 85.

of the social history of elites in one colonial port city. Either way, it is beside the point of this study whether the craving for reputation is instilled through nature or through nurture. The important fact as far as this study is concerned is that each of the major categories of immigrants and sojourners present in colonial Singapore – Chinese, Eurasians, Europeans, Indians, and Malays – came from societies which valued symbolic capital,<sup>95</sup> and they brought their aspirations for symbolic rewards with them to colonial Singapore.

Documentary evidence for the interest of Asian and European elites in the enhancement of their symbolic capital may be found in their own writings. When Rajabali Jumabhoy, a prominent Indian Singaporean businessman and community leader in twentieth-century Singapore, listed the accomplishments of his lifetime in his memoirs, he put the building of his family's name at the top of the list.<sup>96</sup> In the pages of his memoirs, Rajabali Jumabhoy documented his many achievements, including his success in acquiring symbols of prestige and status, by cataloguing the numerous prestigious organisations which he joined or founded, the many leadership positions he held, his conspicuous services to the community, the public events in which he participated, the many important people whom he knew, and the many honours which he received, especially from the 1920s through the 1950s – the last four decades of the colonial era in Singapore. His book is an autobiographical testament to his social

---

<sup>95</sup> Regarding honour and prestige, see: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, esp. Chapters 10, 11, 13, and 17, pp. 114-124, 143, and 175; see also: John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia*. Regarding *nama*, see: Anthony Milner, *Kerajaan: Malay Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule*, especially pp. xvi, 104, 105, and 106. Regarding *face* or *mien-tzu* (also spelled *mianzi*), see, for example: P. Christopher Earley, *Face, Harmony, and Social Structure: An Analysis of Organizational Behaviour across Cultures*, pp. 36-38, 42-79, and 212-213.

<sup>96</sup> Rajabali Jumabhoy, *Multiracial Singapore – On to the Nineties*, p. 76.

success, documenting his achievement of public prominence and prestige as the just rewards for his many years of dedicated public service.

Asian and European elites clearly shared an interest in the symbols of status and prestige. N.I. Low explained that Chinese immigrants who made their fortunes in the Nanyang would aspire to return to China and acquire houses there, in order to enhance their reputations.<sup>97</sup> The books written by Sir Ong Siang Song,<sup>98</sup> Charles Burton Buckley,<sup>99</sup> and Walter Makepeace *et al.*,<sup>100</sup> documented the gatherings, organisations, titles, and honours of Asian and European elites. The writings of two of the most prominent European elites in colonial Singapore, Sir Stamford Raffles and Sir Frank Swettenham, in which they recorded their accomplishments and asserted their roles as leading empire-builders, suggest that they were concerned with establishing their reputations in their lifetimes – and, most likely, beyond their lifetimes as well.

### **Conspicuous Philanthropy and Public Service**

Of course, this study does not argue that the striving for prestige (including the striving for wealth as a means to gain prestige) was the *only* motivation which activated the interactions of elites. The honourable desire to accomplish good deeds for others can be an important motivation. Many elites in Singapore and elsewhere have devoted much of their energy and wealth to philanthropic, patriotic, and other public service-oriented activities, and this study certainly does not question the profound sincerity of their altruism in selflessly working for the good of their fellow human beings. The great generosity and public-spirited activities of elites were quite naturally rewarded with the

---

<sup>97</sup> Low Ngiong Ing, *Recollections: Chinese Jetsam on a Tropic Shore*, p. 112.

<sup>98</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*.

<sup>99</sup> Charles Burton Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*.

<sup>100</sup> Walter Makepeace, Gilbert E. Brooke, and Roland St. J. Braddell, editors, *One Hundred Years of Singapore*.

popular praise and respect accorded to these public benefactors. Indeed, philanthropy, patriotic endeavours, and other forms of public service were (and are) without a doubt some of the most effective means for elite individuals to convert their wealth, connections, and leadership skills into enhanced levels of prestige – so effective, in fact, that their names may still be well-known and admired for their public service long after they have passed away.

When elites in Singapore helped other people, they also benefited in terms of the enhancement of their own reputations. Good deeds naturally translated into good names. Doing good for others was one way in which the names of worthy public benefactors could find their way into newspapers and books, as well as being commemorated in the names of organisations, whether or not such considerations had anything to do with why these elites decided to serve the public. Of course, some generous individuals may have made anonymous donations, which have left no documentary evidence and are thus outside the scope of this exploration of social history. However, even if it were possible to somehow find information on anonymous charitable donations, such information would be completely irrelevant to this study, since this study is concerned with charity and philanthropy which was public and conspicuous, and thus served social and symbolic purposes for elite benefactors, by affirming their elite status and asserting their fellow membership in the multiracial community of prestige.

In addition to attracting public praise and admiration for elites as individuals, the patriotic, charitable, and other public-spirited activities of elites brought these elites together in cooperative interaction, fostering a sense of the elite class as a community at the centre of society, and presenting a collective public image of this class, an image

characterised by leadership, civic duty, and social centrality. Asian and European elites cooperated closely in charitable activities, such as donating funds to the Tan Tock Seng Hospital,<sup>101</sup> the Irish Famine Relief Fund in 1880,<sup>102</sup> the North China Famine Relief Fund in 1889,<sup>103</sup> the Transvaal War Fund in 1899,<sup>104</sup> and the Indian Famine Relief Fund in 1900.<sup>105</sup> Public service and good deeds are concepts which bridge cultural boundaries; they could be mutually recognised as honourable by anyone in this diverse population, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or culture, distinguishing and setting them apart in the public perception of their leadership role, both individually as well as collectively as a class.

The collective prestige of the elite class and of all of the Asian and European elites who belonged to this class was based on more than their just their wealth, power, and influential social connections; their collective prestige was also (and perhaps most importantly) founded upon the leadership, philanthropy, and public service which they provided to the diverse colonial society. The conspicuous public service of Asian and European elites made their leadership visible and known to at least a significant segment of the general population and enhanced and sustained the public image of their class as a

---

<sup>101</sup> *Singapore Free Press*, 7 January 1853, p. 2, R0006018; “Tan Tock Seng’s Hospital Ordinance.” In: *The Laws of the Straits Settlements Edition of 1936*, Volume V, Chapter 192, pp. 145-149; Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years’ History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 61-66; Kamala Devi Dhoraisingam and Dhoraisingam S. Samuel, *Tan Tock Seng: Pioneer: His Life, Times, Contributions and Legacy*.

<sup>102</sup> Regarding the Irish Famine Relief Fund in 1880, see: *Straits Times*, 27 March 1880, p. 5; 3 April 1880, p. 2; and 17 April 1880, pp. 1 and 6, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016427.

<sup>103</sup> Regarding the North China Famine Relief Fund in 1889, see: *Straits Times*, 9 February 1889, p. 3; 13 February 1889, Supplement page; 16 February 1889, p. 2; 27 February 1889, p. 3; 8 March 1889, p. 2; 15 June 1889, p. 2, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016441.

<sup>104</sup> Regarding the Transvaal War Fund, see: *Straits Times*, 20 November 1899, p. 3; 21 November 1899, p. 3; 22 November 1899, p. 3; 23 November 1899, p. 3; 24 November 1899, p. 3; 27 November 1899, p. 3; 28 November 1899, p. 3; 30 November 1899, p. 3; 2 December 1899, p. 3; 5 December 1899, p. 3; 7 December 1899, p. 3; 18 December 1899, p. 2; and 20 December 1899, p. 2, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016462.

<sup>105</sup> Regarding the Indian Famine Relief Fund in 1900, see: *Straits Times*, 10 March 1900, p. 3; 14 March 1900, pp. 2 and 3; 24 March 1900, p. 3; 2 April 1900, p. 3; 5 April 1900, p. 2; 7 April 1900, p. 3; 11 April 1900, p. 3; 19 May 1900, p. 3; and 26 June 1900, p. 2, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016463.



source of leadership at the centre of the colonial society. Today, we can gain some idea of how philanthropy associated Asian and European elites in the public eye by looking at certain stone tablets, which were inscribed with the names of the donors of funds and which are still on display today.

For example, the stone tablets at the entrance of the historic St. Joseph's Institution – now the Singapore Art Museum – display the names of prominent individuals and companies. These were the donors of funds to St. Joseph's Institution in the early years of the twentieth century. The names include S.A. Alkoff, S.O.B.M. Alsagoff, Governor Sir John Anderson, Barlow & Company, J.A. Elias, Guthrie & Company, Lee Choon Guan, John Little & Company, Loke Yew, Meyer Brothers, Oei Tiong Ham, W.H. Shelford, Straits Trading Company, Straits Steamship Company, E. Tessensohn, Tan Keong Saik, Tan Jiak Kim, Wee Bin & Company, and Wong Ah Fook, among many others. Another example is the tablet in Oei Tiong Ham Hall (now the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy) which commemorates donations to Raffles College in the 1920s from individuals and companies. The names on this tablet include the Bank of Taiwan, Eu Tiong Sen, the Estate of Loke Yew, Manasseh Meyer, Mansfield & Company, Mitsui & Company, Moona Kader Sultan, Oei Tiong Ham, Singapore Cold Storage, Straits Trading Company, Sultan Ibrahim of Johore, Tan Kah Kee, Tan Soo Bin, Tan Soo Guan, the Estate of Tye Kee Yuen, and the Yokohama Specie Bank, among others.

Through such public-spirited generosity towards educational institutions, as indicated by the lists of names inscribed on tablets displayed in St. Joseph's Institution and Oei Tiong Ham Hall, prominent Asian and European individuals were put into very

good company with one another as fellow elites, and their generosity was recorded in a durable fashion in stone, on tablets which may still be viewed today. These are examples of the public representation of the multiracial nature of the elite class of colonial Singapore. Having their names listed together on these stone tablets, where they could be seen by many others, was one of the ways in which Asian and Western elites were symbolically grouped together as fellow members of the elite class.

Asian and European elites cultivated the reputation of their class for conspicuous generosity, especially in the areas of education and health care. Such high-profile generosity, publicised in public meetings and newspaper reports, encouraged the public to expect socially-responsible leadership in public service from the elite class, and fostered the public perception of this collective image of the elites as a class, an image characterised by prominent leadership and social responsibility in public service – an image of distinction and prestige. This public image affirmed the location of the multiracial elite class at the prestigious focal-point and centre of the colonial society. The socially-responsible prestigious image of the elite class collectively reflected upon the individual members of this class, fostering the symbolic value which could potentially be gained by individuals through joining and belonging to this class and its institutions, by associating with leading members of this class, and by participating in its rituals, celebrations, and social events.

Elite-level public service was a component of a social mechanism which helped to sustain and perpetuate the elite class and institutions year after year, legitimating and validating their status and ascendancy in the centre of the colonial society. The conspicuous nature of high-profile philanthropic activities and public service by elites

doubtlessly encouraged their fellow elites to follow their good example, of doing good for their society and enhancing their prestige at the same time. Such activities thus attracted and co-opted new members of the elite class, thus promoting the social integration of Asian and European elites, both by helping to reduce the social distance between them, and by bringing them together in the same locale in social space, as well as by providing them with opportunities to interact and cooperate in public service activities.

As elites accomplished and organised socially conspicuous public service, they enhanced the prestige of their entire class and its institutions, as well as their own individual status as the leading elites within their class; these developments, in turn, activated the magnetic attraction of symbolic capital which pulled new elites into this class and these institutions, energising these junior elites to follow or surpass the examples set by their seniors in public service – and so the cycle continued, year after year, effectively reproducing the cosmopolitan elite class. Much as the magnetic effect of the pro-business free port policies in colonial Singapore attracted merchants from various places – including Arabia, China, Europe, India, Java, Mesopotamia, Persia,<sup>106</sup> and Southeast Asia – to settle in this thriving port city, so too did the prestigious *social* magnetism of the institutions and social space of the multiracial elite class attract the aspiring elites of various races, motivating them to associate with the established elites, to identify with their heritage and traditions, to become members and leaders of prestigious

---

<sup>106</sup> The Armenians of Singapore were *Parskahayks* or Persian Armenians, who came to Singapore and Penang either directly from Persia, or from India or Java. See: Nadia H. Wright, *Respected Citizens: The History of Armenians in Singapore and Malaysia*, p. 6.

organisations, and to take part in select social functions, conspicuous public service endeavours, and elite-organised public celebrations and sporting activities.

The public service component of elite-level activity and interaction greatly benefited the general population in many ways, as well as benefiting the elites, socially as well as symbolically. As elites devoted much of their time and resources to public service, charity, and community leadership, the less-fortunate members of the population benefited materially, while the elites benefited as individuals by gaining symbolic capital personally and by gaining social capital through working with one another – and, thus, cultivating both the prestigious collective image and the internal social cohesion of their multiracial elite class. The public service and civic leadership offered by Asian and European elites affirmed and legitimated their social ascendancy and their location within the institutional centre of the colonial society. On a personal level, charity and participation in public service likely contributed to a sense of personal achievement and self-worth for elites as individuals, giving them the satisfaction of having accomplished good deeds, especially for the benefit of those members of the public who were less fortunate than them.

Through public service, individual elites could enhance their self-esteem and find a sense of self-fulfilment<sup>107</sup> by conforming to ideal images or standards of community leaders and benefactors, and giving something back to the society from which they had benefited.<sup>108</sup> The names of individuals who accomplish truly great deeds of public service may be remembered by future generations. Meanwhile, on a social level, by serving the needs of the public, Asian and European elites demonstrated their sense of

---

<sup>107</sup> On *self-fulfilment*, see: A.H. Maslow, “A Theory of Human Motivation,” in: Jay M. Shafritz and Albert C. Hyde, editors, *Classics of Public Administration*, p. 135.

<sup>108</sup> See: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, pp. 110-111.

*noblesse oblige* and their rights to be the leaders of their community, and the right of their class to constitute the centre of the society. Whatever the motivation of each individual elite – or multiple motivations, since individuals, can of course, have more than one reason for following a given course of action – public service clearly functioned to reinforce the reputation and status of individual elites and the prestige, centrality, and social integration of the elite class.<sup>109</sup>

The exploration of the nature of the centre of colonial society in Singapore involves the acknowledgment of the crucial role of Asian elites in the development of the colonial system here, a system which was a joint venture of interdependent Asian and European elites. The colonial system in Singapore and its Malayan hinterland could not have developed and persisted as it did without the active involvement and contributions of Asian elites, especially the Chinese business elites. Leading colonial officials were well aware of the debt which the colonial economy here owed to the Chinese; Sir Frank Swettenham, Sir Hugh Clifford, Sir Richard Winstedt, and Sir George Maxwell each publicly praised the Chinese for their enormous contributions to the development of Malaya.<sup>110</sup> This study endeavours to reclaim the colonial past of Singapore for the Asian

---

<sup>109</sup> Regarding the social functions of *noblesse oblige* and public service, charity and philanthropy, see: Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*, p. 29; P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion 1688-1914*, pp. 33-34; Harvey Warren Zorbaugh, *The Gold Coast and the Slum*, p. 51; Gabriel A. Almond, *Plutocracy and Politics in New York City*, pp. 79-80, 81, 107, and 188-189; G. William Domhoff, *The Higher Circles*, p. 96; Wang Gungwu, "The Culture of Chinese Merchants," in: *China and the Chinese Overseas*, p. 187; and C.F. Yong, (Yong Ching-fatt), *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, pp. 7-8, 110-111, 129, 130, and 131.

<sup>110</sup> Regarding praise and acknowledgement for the Chinese contribution to the development of Malaya by leading colonial officials, see: Sir Frank Swettenham, *British Malaya: An Account of the Origin and Progress of British Influence in Malaya*, pp. 231-233, 293, 301, and 351; Sir Hugh Clifford, "A Lesson from the Malay States," *The Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 84, No. 505 (November 1899), p. 599; Governor Sir Hugh Clifford's "Address by His Excellency the Governor to Members of the Legislative Council at a Meeting held on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of October, 1927," pp. C 258-C 259, in: Robert L. Jarman, ed., *Annual Reports of the Straits Settlements*, Vol. 9, pp. 13-14; Sir Richard Winstedt, *Malaya: The Straits Settlements and the Federated and Unfederated Malay States*, p. 121; and: Sir George Maxwell, "The Mixed

elites of that time – or, at least, to give them the attention they deserve for their central place, their highly privileged and richly rewarded role in the colonial system here, and to highlight the nature of the status of these Asian elites and their connection with their European fellow elites in terms which were likely quite obvious in the colonial past, but which have, perhaps, been overlooked or under-appreciated by subsequent generations.

Chinese and other Asian elites played leading roles in economic development and public service, and enjoyed rich material and symbolic rewards for their efforts. Asian elites were as active and successful as empire-builders and colonisers here as were Sir Stamford Raffles and other European elites – indeed, in terms of economic rewards, the wealthy Asian businessmen were known in their time as the richest men on the island;<sup>111</sup> they were, apparently, more financially successful within the colonial system than their European fellow elites, their fellow leading inhabitants of colonial Singapore.<sup>112</sup> In fact,

---

Communities of Malaya,” *British Malaya* (magazine), February 1943, p. 116. See also: C.M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements*, pp. 127-128, regarding European views of Chinese in the Straits.

<sup>111</sup> Regarding the relative wealth of the richest Asians and Europeans in colonial Singapore, see: C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*, pp. 39-40 and 112-113; and: Carl A. Trocki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control*, p. 104.

<sup>112</sup> Regarding accounts of the wealthy Chinese and other Asians, see: Minute by Governor Robert Fullerton, dated 24<sup>th</sup> August 1829, published as extract number 154 in: C.D. Cowan, editor, “Early Penang & the Rise of Singapore 1805-1832: Documents from the manuscript records of the East India Company...” in the *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. XXIII, Pt. II, March 1950, p. 192 (I am grateful to Clement Liew for kindly bringing this extract to my attention); *Singapore Chronicle*, 1 July 1830, p. 3, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0009222; John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p. 135; Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago*, pp. 32 and 33; John Thomson, *The Straits of Malacca*, p. 64; Isabella L. Bird, *The Golden Chersonese and the Way Thither*, pp. 115 and 116; Sir Frederick A. Weld, “The Straits Settlements and British Malaya,” in: Paul H. Kratoska, editor, *Honourable Intentions*, p. 48; *Straits Times* 14 January 1885, p. 2, and 16 May 1885, p. 2, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016433; T.J. Keaughran, *Picturesque and Busy Singapore*, Singapore National Library microfilm NL 5829, p. 19; Henry Norman, *The Peoples and Politics of The Far East*, pp. 41-42; John Dill Ross, *The Capital of a Little Empire*, National Library of Singapore Microfilm reel NL 5829, p. 69; Arnold Wright and Thomas H. Reid, *The Malay Peninsula: A Record of British Progress in the Middle East*, pp. 221 and 227; W. Feldwick, editor-in-chief, *Present Day Impressions of the Far East and Prominent and Progressive Chinese at Home and Abroad*, p. 837; Rev. W.T. Cherry, *Geography of British Malaya and the Malay Archipelago*, p. 11; Charlotte Cameron, *Wanderings in South-Eastern Seas*, pp. 32-34 and 46; J.E. Nathan, *The Census of British Malaya ... 1921*, p. 91, and: C.A. Vlieland, *British Malaya ... A Report on the 1931 Census*, p. 87 (regarding wealthy Arabs and Jews); Margaret C. Wilson, *Malaya: The Land of Enchantment*, p. 105; John H. MacCallum Scott, *Eastern Journey*, pp. 17-18; René Onraet, *Singapore – A*

Raffles enjoyed very little in the way of material rewards for his role in the establishment of the Settlement of Singapore *during his lifetime*, although the success of Singapore – thanks mainly to Asians – allowed his admirers to endow his name with enormous symbolic capital after his death, sanctifying and consecrating his name as a symbol of prestige that is still highly valued by Singaporeans in the twenty-first century, and still serves as a status symbol which helps to identify the membership and institutions of the Singaporean elite class.

### **Asian Economic Stakeholdership in the Colonial System**

There may be some tendency to exaggerate the economic, political, and social ascendancy or supremacy of the Europeans within the colonial system,<sup>113</sup> or even, perhaps, to imagine that Europeans enjoyed most of the rewards of the colonial system; however, such a view may be challenged by a careful consideration of the substantial degree of status, prestige, and wealth actually enjoyed by Asian colonial elites. It seems clear that Asian elites held even larger stakes in the economic system of colonial Singapore – as well as the political and social systems – than their European fellow elites, and that these Asian colonial elites enjoyed rich rewards from their extensive shareholdings in colonialism. The role of Asian elites as economic stakeholders in the colonial system in Singapore and Malaya, who enjoyed rich economic benefits from this system, complemented their equally important role as symbolic stakeholders, who enjoyed rich rewards in terms of the symbolic capital of status and prestige within the

---

*Police Background*, p. 12; Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, p. 145; and: C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*, pp. 38-40 and 113.

<sup>113</sup> Some readers might possibly form some sense of an overestimation of European wealth and power in colonial Singapore by reading, for example: Robert W. Hefner, "Introduction: Multiculturalism and Citizenship in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia," in: Robert W. Hefner, editor, *The Politics of Multiculturalism: Pluralism and Citizenship in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia*, p. 19, third paragraph.

colonial system. While this study is focused on the social and symbolic aspects of the involvement of Asian elites within colonialism (together with their Western fellow elites), a brief discussion of the economic stakeholdership of Asian elites in colonialism will help to provide the economic context for their symbolic and social success.

The ownership of valuable properties by wealthy Asians provides some sense of the extent of Asian elite economic stakeholdership in the colonial system on this island. As early as the 1820s, in the first decade of the Settlement, Asians owned much of the land in the business district of Singapore, around Commercial Square.<sup>114</sup> This square became Raffles Place in 1858, and has generally been regarded as the prestigious *European* business district of colonial Singapore, in spite of the fact that wealthy Asians actually owned so much of this place throughout the colonial era.<sup>115</sup> The economic success of wealthy Asians was clearly perceived during this time. According to a first-hand account, there were a number of respectable and wealthy Malacca Chinese in Singapore as early as January 1820, less than a year after the founding of the Settlement.<sup>116</sup> In 1829, Governor Robert Fullerton reported that the richest inhabitants in the Straits Settlements (which included Singapore, Malacca, and Penang) were Chinese and Indians.<sup>117</sup> A letter published in the *Singapore Chronicle* in 1830 claimed that it was

---

<sup>114</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 25-26; Leong Foke Meng, "Early Land Transactions in Singapore: The Real Estates of William Farquhar (1774-1839), John Crawford (1783-1868), and Their Families," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume LXXVII, Part 1 (June 2004), pp. 23-42; see especially pp. 37 and 42.

<sup>115</sup> See also the mentions of Asian owners of property in Raffles Place, in: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 271 and 311-312.

<sup>116</sup> This was reported in a letter written in Singapore in January 1820 and published – without the name of its author – in *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British India and its Dependencies*, Vol. X, No. 57, September 1820, p. 293. British Library shelf mark ST 76.

<sup>117</sup> Minute by Governor Robert Fullerton, dated 24<sup>th</sup> August 1829, published as extract number 154 in: C.D. Cowan, editor, "Early Penang & the Rise of Singapore 1805-1832: Documents from the manuscript records of the East India Company..." in the *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. XXIII, Pt. II, March 1950, p. 192; I am grateful to Clement Liew for kindly bringing this extract to my



a well-known fact that most of the people who had become wealthy in Singapore were Chinese businessmen.<sup>118</sup> Similar claims indicating that the richest people in colonial Singapore were wealthy Asians, based on first-hand contemporary observations, were published (for example) in 1898, 1928, and 1939.<sup>119</sup>

While these first-hand observations of Asian wealth might be dismissed as merely anecdotal evidence, an official document from the mid-nineteenth century provides more detailed information on the extent of Asian stakeholderism in the economy of colonial Singapore, in terms of Asian ownership of valuable assets or economic capital. Ships have always been one of the most important types of economic capital in this port city, and Asians have traditionally owned many of these ships. For example, according to a list published in 1863 showing the names, rigging, and tonnage of a total of about 150 ships which belonged to Singapore at that time, Chinese owned most of these vessels, about 85 ships in all, while the owners of the remaining ships included Arabs, Europeans, and Indians, and the names of the owners of twenty-five of the ships were not included in the list.<sup>120</sup>

### **Wealthy Asians Controlled Much of the Property in Colonial Singapore**

Besides ships, Asians also controlled a great deal of valuable landed property in colonial Singapore. Not surprisingly, the Chinese were particularly prominent in the acquisition of land titles, right from the earliest days of the Settlement. Twenty-two of

---

attention. See also: *Singapore Chronicle*, 1 July 1830, p. 3, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0009222.

<sup>118</sup> A letter from “Paul Pry in the Straits” to the editor of the *Singapore Chronicle*, published in: *Singapore Chronicle*, 1 July 1830, p. 3, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0009222.

<sup>119</sup> John Dill Ross, *The Capital of a Little Empire: A Descriptive Study of a British Crown Colony in the Far East* (1898) p. 69; Ashley Gibson, *The Malay Peninsula and Archipelago* (1928), p. 32; John H. MacCallum Scott, *Eastern Journey* (1939), pp. 17-18.

<sup>120</sup> *The Straits Calendar and Directory For The Year 1863*, pp. xxxix-xli, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0011768. I am grateful for Clement Liew for bringing this to my attention.

the fifty-one 999-year leases of landed property in Singapore issued on 20 April 1826 were registered to Chinese landholders, including Tan Che Sang and Choa Chong Long; and Chinese acquired another 199 leases in 1827, and 84 leases in 1828.<sup>121</sup> Some of the Chinese landholdings were in Commercial Square, which later became Raffles Place.<sup>122</sup> Tan Che Sang's properties included a warehouse in Commercial Square, and a parcel of land that covered over fifty-one thousand square feet, bounded by High Street and the Singapore River.<sup>123</sup> Around 1831, Yeo Kim Swee acquired an extensive property along the High Street side of the river, which had previously been controlled by a European firm called Morgan and Company; this property later belonged to Seah Eu Chin.<sup>124</sup> According to an account written in 1864, all of the godowns or warehouses along the Singapore River belonged to Chinese, with the exception of some European godowns located near the river's mouth.<sup>125</sup>

The extensive and conspicuous properties of Asian landholders made it clear that they had successfully appropriated much (if not most) of the available landed properties within this supposedly *European* colonial Settlement, and thereby displayed the extensive Asian stakeholderhood in so-called *Western* colonialism in this place this supposedly *Western* colonialism was apparently protecting the interests of *Asian* landowners. Asian landholders evidently controlled most of the landholdings within the Singapore

---

<sup>121</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 25-26. For information on the 999-year leases in 1826, see: Lo Wai Ping and Lim Jen Hui, "The Development of Land Registration in Singapore," in: Kevin Y.L. Tan, editor, *Essays in Singapore Legal History*, pp. 221.

<sup>122</sup> See the information on early Chinese landholdings in: "Portuguese Missions Ordinance," in: *The Laws of the Straits Settlements Edition of 1936. In Five Volumes*, Volume V, Chapter 251, Schedule C, p. 684.

<sup>123</sup> Leong Foke Meng, "Early Land Transactions in Singapore: The Real Estates of William Farquhar (1774-1839), John Crawfurd (1783-1868), and Their Families," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume LXXVII, Part 1 (June 2004), p. 28, footnote 31; Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 14.

<sup>124</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 43.

<sup>125</sup> John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India: Being a Descriptive Account of Singapore, Penang, Province Wellesley, and Malacca; Their Peoples, Products, Commerce, and Government*, p. 56. This book was written in 1864 and published in 1865.

Municipality by the middle of the nineteenth century. When the official list of about three hundred Singapore ratepayers who were qualified to stand for election as Municipal Commissioners was published in the *Singapore Free Press* in 1857, three-quarters of the names of individuals and firms on this list were Asian.<sup>126</sup> Since these ratepayers were qualified for election as Municipal Commissioners based on the value of the rates assessed on the landed property which they held within the Municipal limits, according to the annual rental value of their property,<sup>127</sup> this list may be taken as solid evidence that most of the three hundred principal property owners in the town of Singapore in 1857 were Asians.

This information on Asian landownership in 1857 indicates that the colonial system which operated in Singapore was a system in which most of the principal stakeholders were Asians, despite the fact that this system is generally regarded as an example of so-called *European* colonialism. Unfortunately, this list does not show how much property each person owned. However, Tan Kim Seng, who was a Singapore Municipal Commissioner in 1856 and 1857,<sup>128</sup> owned approximately one-half of the landed property from Telok Blangah to what is now Clementi Road, amounting to 2,859 acres – according to Lee Kip Lin, Tan Kim Seng’s property was most likely the most

---

<sup>126</sup> See the list of mostly names of individuals, as well as some names of firms, in a “Municipal Notification” published in the *Singapore Free Press*, 26 November 1857, p. 1, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0006022. About 225 of the roughly 300 names on this list, or 75 percent, were Asian.

<sup>127</sup> See Act No. XXV of 1856, and XXVII of 1856, published in a “Government Notification” in the *Singapore Free Press*, 8 January 1857, p. 1, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0006022; see especially Sections III and IV of Act No. XXV, regarding assessment of rates, and Section VI of Act No. XXVII, regarding the qualification for election as Municipal Commissioners, which was the payment of at least forty rupees in annual rates.

<sup>128</sup> Tan Kim Seng was listed as a Municipal Commissioner in a report on a meeting of the Municipal Commissioners held on 29<sup>th</sup> December 1856, published in the *Singapore Free Press*, 1 January 1857, p. 3, R0006022. Regarding Tan Kim Seng and the Municipal Commission, see also: *Singapore Free Press*, 15 January 1857, supplement p. 1, R0006022; *Singapore Free Press*, 1 October 1857, p. 4, R0006022; *Singapore Free Press*, 22 October 1857, p. 4, R0006022.

extensive private landholding in the history of Singapore.<sup>129</sup> Asian property owners probably retained their major stakeholding in Singapore landed property throughout the colonial era.<sup>130</sup> In the 1880s, wealthy Arabs and Chinese lived in bungalows near the town of Singapore.<sup>131</sup> In 1885, the *Straits Times* claimed that the Chinese owned much of the countryside outside of the town.<sup>132</sup> In 1891, Ang Lim Thai acquired a property at Raffles Quay on what is now part of the site of the Asia Insurance Building.<sup>133</sup>

The fact that large amounts of property in colonial Singapore were controlled by Asians, as shown in the list of Singapore ratepayers published in the *Singapore Free Press* in 1857 and other information presented above, is given additional support by similar official lists published in the *Straits Government Gazette* in 1858, and in the *Straits Settlements Government Gazette* in 1869, 1887, and 1894.<sup>134</sup> These examples suggest that Asians controlled much of the property in this colonial Southeast Asian port city. Indeed, some of these lists are comprised mainly of Chinese names, with substantial numbers of Arab names, together with names belonging to other ethnic groups. The outpost of so-called *Western* colonialism and imperialism established on this island seems to have served the interests of Asian property owners, as well as Europeans;

---

<sup>129</sup> Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*, p. 55.

<sup>130</sup> Regarding extensive property ownership in Singapore by wealthy Chinese in the second half of the nineteenth century, see: Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, p. 145. See also: *Straits Times*, 10 February 1887, quoted in: Brenda S.A. Yeoh, *Contesting Space: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment in Colonial Singapore*, p. 59; and: *Straits Times*, 16 May 1885, p. 2, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016433.

<sup>131</sup> Sir Frederick A. Weld, "The Straits Settlements and British Malaya," A paper presented to the Royal Colonial Institute on 10 June 1884, in: Paul H. Kratoska, editor, *Honourable Intentions: Talks on the British Empire in South-East Asia delivered at the Royal Colonial Institute 1874-1928*, p. 48.

<sup>132</sup> *Straits Times*, 16 May 1885, p. 2, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016433.

<sup>133</sup> Straits Settlements Statutory Land Grant No. 2911 dated 21 October 1891. I am grateful to Simon Monteiro for showing me this document, which is in his collection.

<sup>134</sup> *Straits Government Gazette*, 26 November 1858, pp. 259-261; *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, No. 45, 5 November 1869, pp. 639-644; *Straits Settlements Government Gazette Extraordinary*, Vol. XXI, No. 59, 14 December 1887, pp. 2440-2450; and: *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 13, 16 March 1894, pp. 344-377.

indeed, *Western* colonialism and imperialism apparently allowed Chinese, Arab, and other Asian property owners to acquire and develop much of the land on this island, to their own advantage. The conspicuous control of landed property by wealthy Asians displayed the Asian elite component of European colonialism.

Regarding the control of property by Arabs, the following example may provide an idea of the economic success of Arabs in Singapore, as measured in terms of their real estate holdings. In December 1869, an advertisement appeared in the *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, announcing an auction of properties to be held at the Court House, by order of the Supreme Court. The sale was the result of a complaint made by Sherifa Salma Binte Omar bin Ally al Fagi and her husband, Syed Hussain bin Mahomed al Habshee, against Syed Ally bin Omar al Junied and others. The advertisement showed that the properties to be sold belonged to the estate of the late Syed Ally bin Mahomed al Junied. The properties were divided into fifty-nine lots, many of which included more than one piece of land. The list of descriptions of the fifty-nine lots covered almost four pages of the *Gazette*. Among them was the family home of Syed Ally bin Mahomed al Junied, on a fifty-thousand square-foot lot extending from High Street to the Singapore River, as well as two brick houses in Amoy Street, twenty brick houses in Church Street, thirty-five brick houses in the Market Street and Philip Street area, six brick houses on the north side of Nankin Street, twenty-four brick houses in the South Bridge Road and Upper Macao Street area, six stables in North Bridge Road, a large house in Armenian Street, over sixty acres of land in various parcels in the Rochore District, fourteen acres in Toah Pyoh District, and one acre in Claymore District, among other properties.<sup>135</sup>

---

<sup>135</sup> *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, No. 51, 17 December 1869, pp. 759-762.

The properties listed above belonged to the estate of just *one* wealthy Arab in 1869 – just *one* example out of the many wealthy Asian landlords of colonial Singapore, a port city which was supposedly an example of *European* colonialism, yet which seems to have been largely (if not mostly) owned by wealthy Asians. The advertisement also showed that the estate of the late Syed Ally bin Mahomed al Junied controlled a one-half share in a number of properties, of which the other one-half share belonged to Syed Ahmed bin Abdulraman al Sagoff. These properties included fourteen brick houses in Crawford Street, three brick houses in Victoria Street, twenty-seven brick houses along Beach Road, ten houses in Java Road, twenty-five houses in Arab Street and North Bridge Road, and eight houses in Jalan Sultan, among other properties.<sup>136</sup> The lists of Arab-owned properties presented above are evidence of Arab wealth in colonial Singapore, and of the success of the leading Arabs within this so-called *European* colonial system.

Asians continued to control much of the property in colonial Singapore in the twentieth century. *Circa* 1908, one local Chinese dentist owned fifty-one houses in Singapore, while an Arab firm, Alkaff & Company, was thought to be the greatest private landowner here, with a property tax assessment that was second only to that of the Tanjong Pagar Dock Board.<sup>137</sup> Cheang Jim Chuan, a son of the wealthy nineteenth-century opium merchant and Justice of the Peace Cheang Hong Lim (after whom Hong Lim Green was named),<sup>138</sup> was one of the principal property owners in Singapore *circa*

---

<sup>136</sup> *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, No. 51, 17 December 1869, pp. 759-762.

<sup>137</sup> Arnold Wright and H.A. Cartwright, editors, *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya* (1908), p. 640 (Look Yan Kit, dentist and landlord) and p. 710 (Alkaff & Co.).

<sup>138</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 168-170.

1923, whose landholdings included office buildings in Raffles Place.<sup>139</sup> A member of the Alkaff family owned ninety-nine houses at the time of his death in October 1923.<sup>140</sup> Sir Manasseh Meyer, a Baghdadi Jewish immigrant who died in 1930, was a major property owner, whose properties included the Adelphi Hotel, the Sea View Hotel, Meyer Chambers in Raffles Place, and a mansion called Belle Vue on a 173-acre estate at Oxley Rise, where he built a grand synagogue for his community.<sup>141</sup> As late as 1940, the estate of Tan Choon Bock – then controlled by his grandson, Tan Cheng Lock (later Tun Dato Sir Cheng Lock Tan) – still included much of the land along Beach Road, Rochore Road, and Raffles Place.<sup>142</sup>

A perusal of the reports of land sales published in the local press suggests that many – if not the vast majority – of the purchasers of property in colonial Singapore were Asians. For example, at a sale in December 1899, Chong Yong Kay and Hoo Kok Wah each bought lots in Merbau Road, while Goh Boon Guan bought three lots along the same road, and Tan Hoo Chiang bought a property which included a European-style residence and nearly two acres of land at No. 17 Thomson Road.<sup>143</sup> At the end of 1899, the *Straits Times* noted that Syed Alkaff and other wealthy Arabs were often buying property.<sup>144</sup> At one land sale in 1919, A.R.S. Arunasalam Chitty bought thirteen acres in Ang Moh Kio, while Yong Soo Chong purchased three acres in Toh Payoh and Low Ban

---

<sup>139</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 271.

<sup>140</sup> John Drysdale, *Singapore: Struggle for Success*, p. xv.

<sup>141</sup> Regarding Sir Manasseh Meyer, see his obituaries in: *Malaya Tribune*, 1 July 1930, p. 9, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0005882; *Singapore Free Press*, 2 July 1930, p. 10, R0006210; and: *British Malaya* (magazine), August 1930, pp. 103-104. See also: Eze Nathan, *The History of Jews in Singapore 1830-1945*, especially p. 30.

<sup>142</sup> K.G. Tregonning, "Tan Cheng Lock: A Malayan Nationalist," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Volume X, Number 1 (March 1979), p. 46, footnote 37.

<sup>143</sup> *Straits Times*, 20 December 1899, p. 2, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016462.

<sup>144</sup> *Straits Times*, 28 December 1899, p. 2, and 30 December 1899, p. 2, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016462. I am grateful to Ten Leu-Jiun for kindly bringing these to my attention.

Seng bought a house at No. 66 Duxton Road.<sup>145</sup> When the properties of the late Haji Abdul Samat bin Abdul Jalil and the late Haji Mohamed Ali bin Haji Abdul Samat were sold by auction in 1922, the buyers included A. Valibhoy, Haji Mohd Yoosuf, Syed Ahmed Alsagoff, Haji Ahmad, Mrs. Rogayah, and Haji Salleh; aside from the estates of Haji Abdul Samat bin Abdul Jalil and Haji Mohamed Ali bin Haji Abdul Samat, other properties auctioned on the same day included seven properties (probably shophouses) purchased by Low Peng Soy, and a 336-acre rubber plantation in Ulu Bedok and Tampenis that was purchased by Goh Heok Seng.<sup>146</sup> At other property auctions in 1922, A.R.P.L. Ramanathan Chitty bought seven acres in Telok Blangah Road, and A.R.M. Nadaysan Chitty bought a plot comprising nearly seventeen thousand square feet in Bukit Timah Road,<sup>147</sup> while K.S.P. Soopaya Chitty bought a property in Owen Road and A.M.P.A. Koomarappa Chitty purchased a property comprising nearly thirteen thousand square feet off Thomson Road, in Derbyshire Road.<sup>148</sup>

Besides wealthy Arabs, Chinese, Eurasians, Indians, Malays, and Jews, another prominent group of prosperous Asians in colonial Singapore were the Japanese, especially in the early decades of the twentieth century. For example, in 1917, the Nisshin Rubber Company owned a 1,042-acre rubber plantation at Yio Chu Kang Road, called the Nisshin Rubber Estate, which had commenced operations in 1905, while Henry Tsutada's 180-acre Chitose Rubber Estate at Lim Chu Kang was opened in 1908, and Takao Endo's fifty-acre Juron Rubber Estate was opened in 1909.<sup>149</sup> Japanese interest in

---

<sup>145</sup> *Malaya Tribune*, January 29, 1919, p. 5, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0005815.

<sup>146</sup> *Straits Times*, 27 October 1922, p. 10, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016597.

<sup>147</sup> *Straits Times*, 14 November 1922, p. 10, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016597.

<sup>148</sup> *Straits Times*, 20 November 1922, p. 11, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016598.

<sup>149</sup> *The New Atlas and Commercial Gazetteer* (1917), NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0030259, Index section, p. 78. See also: *Prewar Japanese Community in Singapore – Picture and Record* (1998), especially the mention of a Japanese rubber plantation on p. 227, and the photos on pp. 49 and 189.



Singapore property culminated in their military conquest of the island in February 1942, and their occupation of this place (which they called *Syonan*) until September 1945.

Still, it seems likely that the Chinese were always the leading owners of property on the island – individuals such as Tan Kim Seng, Cheang Hong Lim, and Tan Choon Bock, and their descendants, as mentioned earlier. An account written by an official with the Japanese occupation authorities suggests that most of the Singapore property owners who escaped the island prior to the Japanese invasion in 1942 were Chinese;<sup>150</sup> among the Singapore Chinese who left Singapore before the Japanese conquered the island were Lee Kong Chian, Lien Ying Chow, Tan Chin Tuan, and Tan Kah Kee. Perhaps a painstaking search for records of the control of property by wealthy Asians in colonial Singapore would bring to light many other examples of extensive landholdings by wealthy Asian elites; but the examples listed above are sufficient to give some idea of the extent to which the Settlement of Singapore was largely owned by Asians, rather than just by Europeans, as some people might believe nowadays, given the fact that Singapore is generally regarded as a *European* colonial port city.

The evidence of extensive control of property by Asians in colonial Singapore indicates that the colonial system here may actually have been far more *Asian* than is, perhaps, commonly believed, since these Asian property owners were clearly some of the leading economic beneficiaries of the development of colonial Singapore. To a great extent, wealthy Asian elites literally *owned* colonial Singapore; and it is clear that imperialism worked very well indeed for these Asian elites. Colonialism – at least in Singapore and Malaya – was carried out by, and for the benefit of, Asian elites as well as their European partners. Accounts of the colonial era should not overlook the remarkable

---

<sup>150</sup> Mamoru Shinozaki, *Syonan – My Story: The Japanese Occupation of Singapore*, p. 35.

economic achievements of Asian colonial elites. The successful acquisition and development of valuable landed property by wealthy Asians indicated their success as leading colonists and empire-builders in their own right, who accomplished much of the development of this place. They fully deserve to be ranked among the leading empire-building elites of Singapore and Malaya, along with their European fellow elites. The phenomenal success enjoyed by Asian elites in the acquisition of economic rewards (as well as social and symbolic capital) within the colonial system, suggests a rethinking of the concept of colonialism, away from one which sees colonialism as simply *European*, and towards a conception which sees colonialism as an activity largely carried out by and for Asian elites as well as European elites.

Asian capitalists – especially Chinese capitalists – who were based in Singapore built financial empires which extended deep into the Malayan hinterland and beyond;<sup>151</sup> they developed, financed, and controlled developments in various economic fields, including tin mines, steamship lines, rubber plantations, urban real estate, and banks.<sup>152</sup> Wealthy Asians built the most sumptuous private residences in colonial Singapore,<sup>153</sup>

---

<sup>151</sup> See: Wang Gungwu, “A Short History of the Nanyang Chinese,” in: Wang Gungwu, *Community and Nation: China, Southeast Asia and Australia*, p. 23; and: Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, p. 3.

<sup>152</sup> See: Chiang Hai Ding, “Sino-British Mercantile Relations In Singapore’s Entrepôt Trade 1870-1915,” in: Jerome Ch’en and Nicholas Tarling, editors, *Studies in the Social History of China and South-East Asia: Essays in Memory of Victor Purcell*, pp. 255-257; K.G. Tregonning, *A History of Modern Malaya*, p. 143; W.G. Huff, *The Economic Growth of Singapore*, p. 63; and: J.J. Puthuchery, *Ownership and Control in the Malayan Economy*, p. 130.

<sup>153</sup> Regarding the mansions of the wealthy Chinese in Singapore, see: Arnold Wright and Thomas H. Reid, *The Malay Peninsula: A Record of British Progress in the Middle East* (1912), p. 227; Charlotte Cameron, *Wanderings in South-Eastern Seas* (1924), pp. 34 and 46; Margaret C. Wilson, *Malaya: The Land of Enchantment* (1937?), p. 105; and: John H. MacCallum Scott, *Eastern Journey* (1939), p. 18. See also the first-hand accounts of various European visitors to colonial Singapore, quoted in John Bastin’s *Travellers’ Singapore: An Anthology*, pp. 106, 125, 127, 128, 160, 167, 171, 178-180, and 193. See also: Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, p. 165, endnote 29; and: Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*, *passim*.

cultivated lifestyles of conspicuous opulence,<sup>154</sup> and were reputed in their time to be the richest inhabitants of the place – certainly richer than their European fellow elites in this supposedly *European* colonial Settlement.<sup>155</sup> In the nineteenth century, Chinese capitalists based in Singapore pioneered the tin industry in Malaya.<sup>156</sup> This venture was highly profitable for these Chinese businessmen; one of the leading Malayan tin miners, the Hon. Eu Tong Sen, OBE, built a number of mansions in Malaya, including a million-dollar palace in Singapore called Eu Villa on Mount Sophia.<sup>157</sup> Chinese entrepreneurs enjoyed great success in the tin-mining industry of Malaya. In the early twentieth century, almost all of the employers of tin mine workers in Negri Sembilan, Perak, and Selangor (the major tin-mining centres of Singapore's Malayan hinterland) were Chinese.<sup>158</sup> In 1910, tin mines owned by Chinese capitalists produced 78 percent of all the tin mined in Malaya.<sup>159</sup> To put this figure into a global perspective, Malayan mines usually accounted for at least one-third of the worldwide tin production each year from 1906 to 1938.<sup>160</sup> Even as late as 1954, following years of European investment in tin mining in Malaya,<sup>161</sup> Chinese-owned mines still produced approximately 40 percent of the tin output of this country.<sup>162</sup>

---

<sup>154</sup> Regarding the lifestyles of conspicuous consumption of the wealthy Chinese in colonial Singapore, see: Charlotte Cameron, *Wanderings in South-Eastern Seas* (1924), p. 32; and: Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, p. 146.

<sup>155</sup> See, for example: Ashley Gibson, *The Malay Peninsula and Archipelago* (1928), p. 32; John H. MacCallum Scott, *Eastern Journey* (1939), pp. 17-18.

<sup>156</sup> Chiang Hai Ding, "Sino-British Mercantile Relations In Singapore's Entrepôt Trade 1870-1915," in: Jerome Ch'en and Nicholas Tarling, eds., *Studies in the Social History of China and South-East Asia: Essays in Memory of Victor Purcell*, p. 255; Wong Lin Ken, "Western Enterprise and the Development of the Malayan Tin Industry to 1914," in: C. D. Cowan, ed. *The Economic Development of South-East Asia: Studies in Economic History and Political Economy*, pp. 131-132.

<sup>157</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 332. See also: Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*, pp. 208-209.

<sup>158</sup> J. Norman Parmer, *Colonial Labor Policy and Administration*, p. 31, footnote 81.

<sup>159</sup> Li Dun Jen, *British Malaya: An Economic Analysis*, p. 66.

<sup>160</sup> Li Dun Jen, *British Malaya: An Economic Analysis*, p. 62.

<sup>161</sup> Li Dun Jen, *British Malaya: An Economic Analysis*, pp. 65-66.

<sup>162</sup> J.J. Puthucheary, *Ownership and Control in the Malayan Economy*, p. 84.

Assuming that the Chinese share of the Malayan tin-mining industry represented the investment of only whatever capital that was available within the local Chinese business community in Malaya (including Singapore), while the non-Chinese share included investments potentially drawn from all the capital resources available in the advanced economy of Britain (or even of the Western capitalist economies in general), it would seem that the Singaporean and Malayan Chinese capitalists were remarkably successful in maintaining a substantial share of ownership of productive capacity while engaged in *competitive cooperation*<sup>163</sup> with international Western capital. One of the most successful Chinese capitalist elites in colonial-era Malaya was Loke Yew, a wealthy tin miner who owned landed property in Kuala Lumpur and Singapore; at the time of his death in 1917, his estate was worth almost as much as all of the financial assets of the Selangor government.<sup>164</sup> His wealth allowed his family to continue to be socially prominent, even long after his death. Alan Loke was well known in Malaya, the owner of prize-winning racehorses.<sup>165</sup> Loke Yew's fourth wife founded Associated Theatres Limited in 1935, which opened Cathay Cinema in the sixteen-storey Cathay Building at Dhoby Ghaut in Singapore in 1939; after the war, her son, Loke Wan Tho, became prominent in Singapore society in the 1950s and early 1960s, and was the Chairman of the Cathay Organisation at the time of his death in 1964.<sup>166</sup>

In addition to investing in the Malayan tin industry, Chinese capitalists also took part in the development of rubber plantations in Singapore and its Malayan hinterland in

---

<sup>163</sup> Kingsley Davis, "A Conceptual Analysis of Stratification," *American Sociological Review*, Volume 7, Number 3 (June 1942), p. 314.

<sup>164</sup> John Butcher, "Loke Yew", in: John Butcher and Howard Dick, editors, *The Rise and Fall of Revenue Farming: Business Elites and the Emergence of the Modern State in Southeast Asia*, p. 260.

<sup>165</sup> *British Malaya*, October 1927, p. 143; March 1942, p. 143; S.E. Field, *Singapore Tragedy*, pp. 57-59.

<sup>166</sup> Lim Kay Tong, *Cathay: 55 Years of Cinema*, pp. 5, 6, 12, 14-15, 97-98; Victor Sim, editor, *Biographies of Prominent Chinese in Singapore*, p. 11.

the twentieth century. In 1938, Chinese capitalists owned more than one thousand rubber estates in Malaya, comprising over three hundred thousand acres in total, or almost one-sixth of all the rubber plantation acreage in Malaya at that time.<sup>167</sup> In the middle of the twentieth century, Lee Kong Chian of Singapore was one of the leaders of the rubber industry. In 1951, James Michener wrote that Lee Kong Chian told him that he was then providing Goodyear, the American rubber manufacturing company, with approximately one quarter of its rubber supply.<sup>168</sup>

The achievements of Chinese capitalists in Singapore and Malaya were not limited to successful investments in the tin and rubber industries. Chinese invested in important local companies along with Europeans, including the Tanjong Pagar Dock Company,<sup>169</sup> which was established in 1864,<sup>170</sup> and the Straits Steamship Company, founded in 1890; Chinese investors owned forty percent of the Straits Steamship Company in 1914.<sup>171</sup> Another company which attracted the interest of local Chinese investors was the Straits Trading Company, a tin smelting firm established by a German and a Scotsman and incorporated in 1887. This company was based in Singapore, and opened its smelter on Pulau Brani, a small island in the Singapore Harbour, in 1890. Chinese investors held shares in this company in the early twentieth century,<sup>172</sup> and in the 1950s, Lee Kong Chian was one of its leading shareholders, while also owning large

---

<sup>167</sup> Li Dun Jen, *British Malaya: An Economic Analysis*, p. 86.

<sup>168</sup> James A. Michener, *The Voice of Asia*, p. 142.

<sup>169</sup> A list of the names of shareholders in the Tanjong Pagar Dock Company, including Chinese and Europeans, appeared in the *Straits Times* of 2 September 1876, R0016425. See also the minutes of a Tanjong Pagar Dock Company shareholders' meeting on 4 May 1881, published in the *Singapore Daily Times*, 13 May 1881, p. 2, R0010198; the minutes include a list of the names of shareholders, with Armenian, Chinese, German, Indian, Parsi, Portuguese, and Scottish names among them. See also: Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 160.

<sup>170</sup> George Bogaars, *The Tanjong Pagar Dock Company, 1864-1905*, p. 122.

<sup>171</sup> K.G. Tregonning, *Home Port Singapore: A History of Straits Steamship Company Limited 1890-1965*, pp. 17 and 47.

<sup>172</sup> K.G. Tregonning, *Straits Tin: A Brief Account of the First Seventy-Five Years of The Straits Trading Company, Limited. 1887-1962*, pp. 26-27.

amounts of stock in Fraser & Neave, Sime Darby, Straits Times, and Singapore Cold Storage,<sup>173</sup> while another local capitalist, Tan Chin Tuan, served as a Director of both the Straits Trading Company and the Straits Steamship Company, as well as Fraser & Neave and Robinson & Company.<sup>174</sup> Although these leading Singapore companies were founded by Europeans, they apparently welcomed the involvement of wealthy Asian capitalists.

In addition to their involvement in well-known so-called *European* companies in Singapore, Lee Kong Chian and Tan Chin Tuan were also leading bankers in the Oversea-Chinese Banking Corporation.<sup>175</sup> While Chinese capitalists acquired considerable shares in so-called *European* companies in Malaya,<sup>176</sup> they also invested their wealth in property; in the 1950s, J.J. Puthuchery noted that Chinese landowners probably owned most of the real estate in Malaya.<sup>177</sup> Chinese businessmen also developed manufacturing industries in Singapore; in 1958, over 96 percent of the manufacturing firms in Singapore were owned by Chinese, and these firms provided employment to more than twenty-four thousand workers, which accounted for over 68 percent of the industrial workforce here at that time.<sup>178</sup>

These examples serve to illustrate the prominent role of Chinese capitalists in the colonial-era economy, and thus the great extent of their stake in the colonial system, as well as the considerable degree of economic success which they achieved as they cooperated closely with Western capitalist interests. It is important to avoid being misled

---

<sup>173</sup> J.J. Puthuchery, *Ownership and Control*, p. 93, and K.G. Tregonning, *Straits Tin*, p. 65-66 and 135.

<sup>174</sup> J.J. Puthuchery, *Ownership and Control in the Malayan Economy*, p. 109.

<sup>175</sup> Tan Ee Leong, "The Chinese Banks Incorporated in Singapore & the Federation of Malaya." *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 26, Pt. 1, 1953, pp. 127-129; J.J. Puthuchery, *Ownership and Control in the Malayan Economy*, pp. 109 and 135-136.

<sup>176</sup> J.J. Puthuchery, *Ownership and Control*, pp. xix, 93, 109-110, 126-128, and 136.

<sup>177</sup> Puthuchery, *Ownership and Control*, p. 137.

<sup>178</sup> Puthuchery, *Ownership and Control*, p. 102; see also pp. xvi and 99.

by the European names of firms into thinking that these were exclusively European enterprises – when, in fact, a firm with a European name can be owned in whole or in part by Asian shareholders. Similarly, it is important to realise that even a so-called *European* colonial system could have actually benefited Asian colonial elites at least as much as their Western colleagues, symbolically as well as financially. In fact, this supposedly *Western* colonial system protected the assets of Asian property owners in Singapore as much as it protected the assets of their Western fellow property owners. For example, according to Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, Resident William Farquhar ordered an Arab trader named Sayid Yasin to be jailed in 1823, at the request of a merchant from Palembang named Pengeran Sharif Omar, because Sayid Yasin had failed to pay his debt to Pengeran Sharif Omar.

Thus, Farquhar acted to protect the financial interests of an Asian businessman; and this effort led to an attempt on Farquhar's life. Sayid Yasin managed to talk his way out of the jail, stabbed an Indian policeman to death, and then wounded Farquhar with a *kris*, before he himself died from wounds inflicted by some soldiers' bayonets and the sword of Andrew Farquhar, William Farquhar's son. Raffles ordered Sayid Yassin's corpse to be displayed in an iron cage hung from a gibbet in Teluk Ayer, using a form of punishment that was traditional in England as an object lesson to discourage future would-be assassins.<sup>179</sup> However, there was another lesson here: the local authorities would protect the business interests of Asians as well as Europeans in this Settlement. Asian businessmen could appeal to the local authorities for assistance. Since the notoriety of this incident must have ensured that much of the population received the

---

<sup>179</sup> Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, *The Hikayat Abdullah: The Autobiography of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir (1797-1854)*, translated by A.H. Hill, pp. 169-174.

message, and the story would likely have been recounted to visitors and carried by them to other places, it is quite possible that many merchants may have relocated to Singapore as a result of the news of the killing and gibbeting of Sayid Yasin – this incident made it clear that the authorities in Singapore were serious about protecting the interests of Asian businessmen. The European officials and merchants knew that their success in Singapore depended on the presence of Asian merchants, and hence it was in their interests to protect Asian merchants.

The degree of protection which the colonial system accorded to its Asian stakeholders was illustrated by what happened when the system ceased to operate. After the Japanese conquest of Singapore in 1942, both the colonial police powers and the prestige of the imperial government collapsed, and elements of the lower classes were transformed from compliant masses to looters, who even stole from fellow Asians. The Japanese conquerors soon put a stop to the looting by publicly displaying the severed heads of captured looters who had been summarily executed.<sup>180</sup> From 1819 to 1942, the colonial system provided a high degree of security and order for the population, which protected the property rights of the Asians who comprised the majority of the stakeholders in this system. The extent to which Asian elites were economic stakeholders in the colonial system in terms of their ownership of property and other economic capital was paralleled and complemented by their social and symbolic stakeholdership, in terms of their ownership of social and symbolic capital within the colonial social structure and system of status symbols.

---

<sup>180</sup> Aisha Akbar, *Aishabee at War: A Very Frank Memoir*, p. 119.



### **Economic Elites and Social Elites**

The evidence presented above strongly suggests that what might be described as the *economic elite class* of colonial Singapore and its Malayan hinterland included far more Asians than Europeans, and that the leading *economic* colonial elites here were wealthy Asians, even though Singapore was supposedly a product of *European* colonialism. However, it must be remembered that this study of colonial elites is not limited to economic elites. Instead, this study explores the social integration of the elite class as a whole, an elite class which included not only economic elites, but also included official elites (such as political and administrative elites), and professional elites as well; and the leading *official* colonial elites were Europeans.

Since this study is concerned with the patterns and functions of social interactions and connections among members of the colonial elite class as a whole, the topic of this study may be described as the integration and development of a multiracial colonial elite class as a *social class*, a high-status social group of elite individuals who cultivated social connections with one another, belonged to overlapping social circles and organisations, cooperated in the public representation of their status symbols, and recognised the same system of elite status symbols and prestigious institutions. This elite class was open to socially mobile, ambitious individuals of various backgrounds and racial or ethnic identities, who could aspire to be accepted into elite social circles and prestigious associations, included in status-confirming public rituals and institutions, and invested with formal titles and honours that were distributed within the colonial system, in the name of the imperial Crown; by these means these Asian elites were publicly recognised

as members of the multiracial community of prestige, at the summit and centre of the colonial society.<sup>181</sup>

In social history, the leading members of a social elite class may be identified by their patterns of social interactions and public representations. A social class is defined by how the members relate to one another and to the wider society, and not necessarily by whether or not they called themselves members of an elite class. A social class is identified by the fact that its members function socially as a class, whether or not they declare themselves to be members of such a class. Similarly, a hero who modestly denies that he is a hero, is no less a hero because he does not claim to be one; the hero is judged by his actions – and indeed, a modest hero may be even more widely acclaimed than a self-promoting hero. By the same token, a thief who claims to be innocent is no less a thief; society judges and labels thieves and heroes as such because of their actions, not their self-descriptions. Their identities as thieves and heroes respectively are imbued with social reality by virtue of how they are regarded by others, and not necessarily by how they claim to regard themselves.

A social elite class is a group of people who interact with one another, and who represent themselves to the general public, in ways which assert their status as a prestigious group of people who are socially interconnected and positioned at the summit of the wider society. They do these things by promoting and publicising the symbolic value of the elite status symbols with which they associate themselves and one another. This is probably true in all societies, past and present; but students of present-day

---

<sup>181</sup> See the examples of men who achieved wealth and social status in colonial Singapore, in: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore* – see the reference to Tan Tock Seng on p. 66, Foo Teng Quee on p. 96, Khoo Cheng Tiong on pp. 100-101, Gan Eng Seng on p. 273, Wong Ah Shak on p. 288, Teo Hoo Lye on p. 350, and Loke Yew on p. 540. See also: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power*, p. 7.

societies can employ research methods, including direct observations, analysis of responses to questionnaires, and interviews of informants; these methods are obviously unavailable to those who study the social conditions which prevailed a century ago.

While the members of the multiracial elite class of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are unable to answer our questions or to tell us what they thought about one another and their class, the composition and social structures of their class may still be discerned through their patterns of social interactions, since many of their social activities or performances in the theatre of prestige were highly conspicuous and were recorded in documents which have survived to the present day. Social historians who deal with the past beyond living memory cannot rely upon personal observations and the testimony of informants, nor on their responses to questionnaires, in the manner of sociologists; but social historians can explore and analyse the ways in which past elites interacted with one another, and represented themselves to the general public.

Publications such as newspapers and local reference books were important means of such public representation of the elite class, and were themselves important status symbols in their own right. These documents, as artefacts of printed words, can provide social historians with rich sources of contemporary information on the identity of the elites, and the nature of their social interactions and public representations. These documents identified the elites by various terms – for example, as *leading*, *respectable*, *prominent*, *influential*, and *principal* Asian and European inhabitants of Singapore.<sup>182</sup> In certain contexts, these terms may be regarded as indicative of elite status, as perceived by these elites' contemporaries.

---

<sup>182</sup> See, for example, the use of the terms *influential* and *principal* with regard to Asian and European elites respectively, in a letter written by Henry F. Plow, dated 15 July 1868 and published in the *Straits Times Overland Journal*, 18 July 1868, p. 2, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0006767.

The social interactions and interconnections of Asian and Western elites in colonial Singapore provided a social context for their economic and political interdependence. The economic and political success which the relatively small population of European elites enjoyed within the colonial system was largely dependent upon the willing cooperation of their far more numerous Chinese and other Asian partners, who employed their resources of capital, talent, knowledge, and connections in ways which not only made themselves wealthy, but which also benefited the Europeans and sustained and developed the colonial system in Singapore and its Malayan hinterland.<sup>183</sup> The business and political relationships among these Asian and European elites operated in the context of their social connections, connections which were fostered by their cooperation in the creation and mutual enjoyment of rich resources of symbolic capital and the associated institutions, rituals, and public imagery – the patterns of interactions which integrated the Asian and European elites into a cohesive and multiracial community of prestige. The existence of these elite-level social connections between Asians and Europeans meant that colonial Singapore did not conform to the

---

<sup>183</sup> Regarding the economic interdependence and complementarity between Chinese and European business interests in colonial Singapore, see: Chiang Hai Ding, "Sino-British Mercantile Relations In Singapore's Entrepôt Trade 1870-1915," in: Jerome Ch'en and Nicholas Tarling, editors, *Studies in the Social History of China and South-East Asia: Essays in Memory of Victor Purcell*, pp. 255, 260-261, and 265; Chiang Hai Ding, *A History of Straits Settlements Foreign Trade 1870-1915*, pp. 49, 51-53, and 58; Wong Lin Ken, "Singapore: Its Growth as an Entrepôt Port, 1819-1941," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Volume IX, Number 1 (March 1978), pp. 83-84.; Wong Lin Ken, "Commercial Growth before the Second World War," in: Ernest C.T. Chew and Edwin Lee, editors, *A History of Singapore*, pp. 60 and 62; and: J.J. Puthuchery, *Ownership and Control*, pp. xix, 20, 64-65, 68, 74, 93, 109-110, 127-128, and 136. Regarding *compradores* in Singapore, see: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 164 and 273; Wong Lin Ken, "Commercial Growth before the Second World War," in: Ernest C.T. Chew and Edwin Lee, editors, *A History of Singapore*, p. 60; and: Chiang Hai Ding, "Sino-British Mercantile Relations In Singapore's Entrepôt Trade 1870-1915," in: Jerome Ch'en and Nicholas Tarling, editors, *Studies in the Social History of China and South-East Asia: Essays in Memory of Victor Purcell*, p. 255.

classical definition a plural society, as formulated by J.S. Furnivall, who argued that members of different races in a plural society interact only in the economic sphere.<sup>184</sup>

The extent to which Asian elites actually *bought into* and *owned* the colonial system may be revealed by an appreciation of their success in acquiring status symbols and prestige within this system, as well as an exploration of their cooperative interactions with their Western fellow elites. Chinese elites, together with other Asian elites, were at least as much responsible for the social and economic development of colonial Singapore and the Malayan peninsula as were the European elites, and from the vantage point of the early twenty-first century, we may see that the Asian elites were actually even more successful in the long term than the Europeans: while the colonial era ended decades ago, the successors of the colonial-era Asian elites are still at the centre of the post-colonial society today – they are still leaders in the realms of economics and public service, and they still enjoy rich rewards of wealth, status, and prestige.<sup>185</sup> The phenomenal and enduring success of these Asian elites and their centrality within the colonial system leads one to wonder just how *European* was this so-called *European* colonialism – when most of its leading empire-builders and colonisers were actually Chinese and other Asians, and when the leading Asian businessmen and capitalists were apparently the primary beneficiaries of this colonial system, in terms of the wealth and prestige which they gained from it.

---

<sup>184</sup> Regarding J.S. Furnivall's conception of the *plural society*, see: J.S. Furnivall, *Netherlands India: A Study of Plural Economy*, pp. 446 and 449; and: J.S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice*, pp. 303-305.

<sup>185</sup> See: Carl A. Trocki, "Political Structures in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," in: Nicholas Tarling, editor, *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia: Volume Two: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, pp. 89-90. See also: Carl A. Trocki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control*, pp. 77, 108, and 185.

Chinese and Western capitalists and businessmen cooperated closely for their mutual profit; their interactions were characterised more by interdependence and complementarity than by competition or conflict,<sup>186</sup> as Western businessmen relied on their Asian fellow elites for supplies of Asian products and access to Asian markets, while Asian capitalists relied on Western markets, manufactured goods, and finance.<sup>187</sup> Local Chinese and European banks worked closely together,<sup>188</sup> and when one early local Chinese bank, the Chinese Commercial Bank, experienced difficulties in 1914, the colonial government intervened to help this bank stay in business, after the bank's Vice-Chairman, Dr. Lim Boon Keng, arranged for the banks' leaders to have an audience with Governor Sir Arthur Young.<sup>189</sup> Yap Pheng Geck, a prominent banker in Singapore in the 1930s, recalled that the local branches of European banks advised and mentored the new local Chinese banks in their early days, apparently because the European banks regarded the Chinese banks as complementary to their own interests, rather than as rivals, and so naturally wished for them to succeed and prosper.<sup>190</sup> There were also links between Western capital and the local Indian business community in Singapore and Malaya: European banks loaned money to Indian Chettiar moneylenders, who provided credit to

---

<sup>186</sup> Chiang Hai Ding, *A History of Straits Settlements Foreign Trade 1870-1915*, p. 53; Wong Lin Ken, "Singapore: Its Growth as an Entrepot Port, 1819-1941," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Volume IX, Number 1 (March 1978), pp. 83-84; and: J.J. Puthuchery, *Ownership and Control in the Malayan Economy*, pp. xix, 20, 64-65, 68, 74, 93, 109-110, 127-128, and 136.

<sup>187</sup> Chiang Hai Ding, "Sino-British Mercantile Relations In Singapore's Entrepôt Trade 1870-1915," in: Jerome Ch'en and Nicholas Tarling, editors, *Studies in the Social History of China and South-East Asia: Essays in Memory of Victor Purcell*, pp. 255, 260-261, and 265; Wong Lin Ken, "Commercial Growth before the Second World War," in: Ernest C.T. Chew and Edwin Lee, editors, *A History of Singapore*, pp. 60 and 62.

<sup>188</sup> Yap Pheng Geck, *Scholar, Banker, Gentleman Soldier*, pp. 36-37; Lee Sheng-Yi, *The Monetary and Banking Development of Malaysia and Singapore*, p. 70.

<sup>189</sup> Tan Ee Leong, "The Chinese Banks Incorporated in Singapore & the Federation of Malaya," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 26, Pt. 1, 1953, pp. 117-118.

<sup>190</sup> Yap Pheng Geck, *Scholar, Banker, Gentleman Soldier*, pp. 36-37.

other Asian businessmen.<sup>191</sup> There was a considerable degree of mutually-beneficial financial cooperation between Chettiar, Chinese, and European capitalists in colonial-era Southeast Asia.<sup>192</sup>

The social integration of Asian and European elites paralleled their economic integration in Singapore and its Malayan hinterland. An exploration of the social history of the elite class in colonial Singapore suggests that the colonial system here was not so much a mainly *European* entity but was instead, to describe it more accurately, a *cosmopolitan joint venture* of Asian and European elites who were dependent upon one another, a *joint enterprise* or *partnership*, as Carl Trocki has aptly described it,<sup>193</sup> in which most of the partners in colonising and empire-building here were Asian elites. These prosperous Asians quite possibly played the most important leadership roles in the colonial economy and the society here and, in turn, successfully reaped the lion's share of the rewards of wealth and prestige offered by the colonial system to the Asian and European inhabitants of this island. It might be observed that this was true in many other colonial lands as well. John Carroll has described the Chinese in Hong Kong as both the colonisers and the colonised.<sup>194</sup> A study of interactions between Asian and European elites in colonial Singapore may well have implications for the understanding of other colonial settings, in Asia and elsewhere.

---

<sup>191</sup> J.J. Puthucheary, *Ownership and Control in the Malayan Economy*, p. 20; see also p. 68, and: R.B. Krishnan, *Indians in Malaya*, p. 24. See also: Sir Compton Mackenzie, *Realms of Silver: One Hundred Years of Banking in the East*, pp. 108-109. For information on the Chettiar community of Singapore, see: Hans-Dieter Evers and Jayarani Pavadarayan, "Religious Fervour and Economic Success: The Chettiars of Singapore," in: K.S. Sandhu and A. Mani, editors, *Indian Communities in Southeast Asia*, pp. 847-865.

<sup>192</sup> Rajeswary Ampalavanar Brown, *Capital and Entrepreneurship in South-East Asia*, pp. 159, 160, 173, 175, 176, 177, and 180-186.

<sup>193</sup> See the discussion of *joint enterprise*, *partnership*, and *alliance* between Asians and Europeans in colonial Singapore, in: Carl A. Trocki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control*, pp. 48, 76-77, 104, 182, and 185. NUS Central Library Senior Librarian Tim Yap Fuan kindly brought this book to my attention.

<sup>194</sup> John M. Carroll, *Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong*, p. 191.

The study of the history of the cosmopolitan elite class leads to an appreciation of the great and indispensable contributions which Asian elites made to the social, economic, and political development of colonial Singapore and its Malayan hinterland, and of the high degree of responsibility of Asian elites – especially of the leading Chinese businessmen – in the elaboration and longevity of the colonial system here. This appreciation of the active and cooperative role of Asian elites in the development of the colonial system, and of the benefits they derived from it,<sup>195</sup> leads to questioning whether it is accurate to apply terms such as *coloniser*, *colonialist*, *colonist*, and *empire-builder* only to Westerners, which would seem to overlook the prominent location of Asian elites at the centre of the colonial system.<sup>196</sup> To apply these terms only to Westerners in postcolonial accounts of the colonial era could, ironically, perpetuate the tendency of various colonial-era accounts to ascribe the active and central role of empire-building to Europeans, highlighting or overestimating European colonial power<sup>197</sup> and the contributions of Westerners to empire-building, while underestimating the presence of wealthy Asian elites<sup>198</sup> and giving less attention to what was, in fact, the no-less vital and essential role of Asians in the colonial system. A Eurocentric account of the colonial

---

<sup>195</sup> Regarding the economic and symbolic benefits which Chinese elites in Singapore derived from the colonial system, see: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, p. 18.

<sup>196</sup> For example, Chan Kwok Bun and Claire Chiang See Ngoh employed the term *colonialists*, with regard to colonial Singapore, in a way which suggests that they believed that this term applied only to the Europeans here, and not to the Chinese. See: Chan Kwok Bun and Claire Chiang See Ngoh, *Stepping Out: The Making of Chinese Entrepreneurs*, p. 33. For an example of the use of the term *colonist*, see: Chan Kwok Bun and Claire Chiang See Ngoh, *Stepping Out*, pp. 48 (quoting Ng Teow Yhee) and 345.

<sup>197</sup> See: John R.W. Smail, "On the Possibility of an Autonomous History of Modern Southeast Asia," *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Volume 2, No. 2 (July 1961), pp. 80-82; A.C. Milner, "Colonial Records History: British Malaya," *Kajian Malaysia: Journal of Malaysian Studies*, Volume IV, No. 2 (December 1986), pp. 1-18; and: Dane Kennedy, "Imperial History and Post-Colonial Theory," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 24, No. 3, September 1996, p. 353. I am grateful to A/P Yong Mun Cheong for introducing me to Smail's article, and to Haydon Cherry for bringing Dane Kennedy's article to my attention.

<sup>198</sup> See, for example: Alexius Pereira, "It's Us Against Them: Sports in Singapore," in: Chan Kwok Bun and Tong Chee Kiong, editors, *Past Times: A Social History of Singapore*, table on p. 147.



system (whether inspired by anti-imperialism or admiration of imperialism) may underestimate the significant profits in terms of wealth and prestige which Asian elites derived from this system, as well as how much this system relied on the participation of Asian elites.

### **Charitable Activity as Evidence of Wealth and Membership in the Elite Class**

Another indication of the economic success of Asian elites within the colonial system here – specifically, of local Chinese business elites – is the evidence of the prominence and grand scale of charitable activities by the wealthy Chinese in Singapore. The leading role played by Chinese philanthropists in local charitable activities supports the conclusion that these Asian elites were the leading beneficiaries of the colonial system here, and that this system was *their* system as much as it belonged to anyone – they made the colonial system work for their own economic success, as well as for the many recipients of their charity. Of course, the countless examples of great generosity by Chinese businessmen here should not be misinterpreted as evidence that the Chinese were the only charitable inhabitants of colonial Singapore; in fact, wealthy non-Chinese Asians and Europeans of various ethnic groups also engaged in generous philanthropic endeavours here. The prominence of Chinese philanthropy was evidence, instead, of the economic importance of the Chinese section of the population throughout the colonial era, and was consistent with the perception that most of the wealthy people here were Chinese, and that these included most, if not all, of the richest of the rich people.<sup>199</sup> Their wealth,

---

<sup>199</sup> Regarding contemporary perceptions of the wealthy Chinese, see: Minute by Governor Robert Fullerton, dated 24<sup>th</sup> August 1829, published as extract number 154 in: C.D. Cowan, editor, “Early Penang & the Rise of Singapore 1805-1832: Documents from the manuscript records of the East India Company...” in the *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. XXIII, Pt. II, March 1950, p. 192 (I am grateful to Clement Liew for kindly bringing this extract to my attention); *Singapore Chronicle*, 1 July 1830, p. 3, R0009222; John Dill Ross, *The Capital of a Little Empire* (1898), p. 69; Arnold Wright and Thomas H. Reid, *The Malay Peninsula* (1912), pp. 221 and 227; Ashley Gibson, *The*

and hence their ability to engage in generous philanthropy on a massive scale, is evidence for their success within the colonial system, and the fact that this system served the interests of Asian elites.

The Chinese section of the population included many wealthy individuals, and the Chinese established important organisations, such as the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the Hokkien Huay Kuan, with large memberships and wealthy leaders. This is not to overlook the wealth of leading members of the less numerous ethnic sections of the population, such as the Arabs, the Indians, and the Jews; for example, at least one researcher has concluded that Sâlim ibn Tâlib, an Arab merchant who moved to Singapore from Batavia at the beginning of the twentieth century and bought steamships and many shophouses, might well have been the richest man in Singapore in the 1920s and 1930s, and it is believed that he contributed funds to charity.<sup>200</sup> Still, it would seem that most of the wealthy people in colonial Singapore were Chinese, as is to be expected, considering that the bulk of the population during most of the colonial era was Chinese. One source claims that Tan Kah Kee, a Chinese businessmen based in Singapore, had become the richest businessman in Malaya by 1928.<sup>201</sup>

If the non-Chinese sections of the population included fewer rich people, as well as fewer of the richest of the rich, then it should be no surprise if they did not match the grand total of the charitable achievements of the wealthy Chinese businessmen; but this

---

*Malay Peninsula and Archipelago* (1928), p. 32; John H. MacCallum Scott, *Eastern Journey* (1939), pp. 17-18.

<sup>200</sup> Ulrike Freitag, "Arab Merchants in Singapore: Attempt of a Collective Biography," in: Huub de Jonge and Nico Kaptein, editors, *Transcending Borders: Arabs, Politics, Trade and Islam in Southeast Asia*, p. 117.

<sup>201</sup> Charles Robequain, *Malaya, Indonesia, Borneo, and the Philippines*, p. 121.

should not detract from the credit which the non-Chinese elites deserve for their own generous donations to charitable causes.

Perhaps the most renowned Chinese philanthropist of nineteenth-century Singapore was Tan Tock Seng, whose philanthropy resulted in the hospital founded in 1844 and opened in 1849; today, a modern hospital still bears his name. Other early donors to the Tan Tock Seng Hospital included his eldest son, Tan Kim Ching, members of the Parsi community, and Syed Ali bin Mohamed al Junied. By 1851, the Tan Tock Seng Hospital was managed by a multiracial committee, which included some of the leading Chinese and Europeans of Singapore at that time: Thomas Church, Eyo Hood Sing, James Guthrie, Dr. Robert Little, W.H. Read, Seah Eu Chin, Tan Kim Ching, and Tan Kim Seng.<sup>202</sup> In 1857, Tan Kim Seng offered a donation of \$13,000 to the government towards the construction of a public water supply; in 1882, the Singapore Municipality dedicated a fountain to commemorate this donation.<sup>203</sup> Tan Kim Seng's grandson, Tan Jiak Kim, led a group of Asian philanthropists who raised the funds for the establishment of a local medical school, which opened in 1905 and eventually became the King Edward VII College of Medicine.<sup>204</sup> Some of the leading donors to Raffles College in the 1920s included Sir Manasseh Meyer, Oei Tiong Ham, Tan Soo Guan, Eu Tong Sen, the estate of Loke Yew, the estate of Tye Kee Yuen, and Moona Kader Sultan.<sup>205</sup> Aw

---

<sup>202</sup> Kamala Devi Dhoraisingam and Dhoraisingam S. Samuel, *Tan Tock Seng: Pioneer: His Life, Times, Contributions and Legacy*, especially pp. 34-35 and 55-56. See also: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 61-66; and: "Tan Tock Seng's Hospital Ordinance," in: *The Laws of the Straits Settlements Edition of 1936*, Volume V, Chapter 192, pp. 145-149.

<sup>203</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 49.

<sup>204</sup> Edwin Lee, "The Colonial Legacy," in: Kernial Singh Sandhu and Paul Wheatley, editors, *Management of Success*, p. 33; and: Edwin Lee and Tan Tai Yong, *Beyond Degrees: The Making of the National University of Singapore*, pp. 25-43.

<sup>205</sup> See the list of names inscribed on a stone tablet in the lobby of the Oei Tiong Ham Hall, and the articles from the *Straits Times* of 23 July 1929 in the Raffles Scrapbook, NUS Central Library Rare Books Collection Stack #R4091.

Boon Haw and Aw Boon Par (the famous Tiger Balm brothers) donated \$60,000 by 1937 for a new home for the aged in Thomson Road, to be managed by the Little Sisters of the Poor.<sup>206</sup>

Of all the great Asian philanthropists in colonial Singapore, perhaps the most outstanding was the illustrious Tan Kah Kee, an extraordinarily prominent businessman and community leader in Singapore between the World Wars. Tan Kah Kee contributed over eight million dollars to the cause of education, especially Chinese-medium schools in Singapore and China; the beneficiaries of his great generosity in Singapore included the Tao Nan School, the Ai Tong School, the Chong Fok Girls' School, the Chinese High School, the Nan Chiao Girls' High School, the Nanyang Normal School, and Raffles College, while in China he established and funded the Chi Mei Primary School, the Chi Mei High School, the Chi Mei Normal College, and Amoy University.<sup>207</sup> In addition, he also demonstrated his concern for his fellow Chinese by leading efforts to relieve distress caused by several disastrous floods in China.<sup>208</sup> Tan Kah Kee's generosity was made possible by his phenomenal success as a businessman, especially in the rubber business; he was described as Malaya's wealthiest man, *circa* 1928.<sup>209</sup> Tan Kah Kee moved back to China in 1950,<sup>210</sup> but his example of philanthropy, especially towards education, was continued by his very generous son-in-law, Tan Sri Dr. Lee Kong Chian, the founder of

---

<sup>206</sup> *Malaya Tribune*, 8 June 1937, p. 15; 11 June 1937, p. 24; 18 June 1937, p. 12; and 22 June 1937, p. 21, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0005945.

<sup>207</sup> C.F. Yong (Yong Ching-fatt), *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, p. 130.

<sup>208</sup> C.F. Yong (Yong Ching-fatt), *Tan Kah-kee: The Making of an Overseas Chinese Legend*, p. 170.

<sup>209</sup> Charles Robequain, *Malaya, Indonesia, Borneo, and the Philippines*, p. 121.

<sup>210</sup> C.F. Yong, *Tan Kah-kee: The Making of an Overseas Chinese Legend*, p. 333.

the Lee Foundation, who amassed great wealth in rubber and banking during the last several decades of the colonial era in Singapore and Malaya.<sup>211</sup>

The examples listed above provide some sense of the variety of charitable activities by wealthy public benefactors in the colonial era. The historical record of the outstanding charitable achievements of Tan Kah Kee and many other Chinese philanthropists, as well as other Asians and Europeans, was evidence of the admirable personal generosity and great public spirit of these wealthy businessmen, and their phenomenal success in amassing huge fortunes from which charitable donations could be made, as well as of the fact that the colonial system offered them the opportunities they needed to succeed. Clearly, the colonial system worked very well for Chinese and other Asian business elites. The extent of the charitable achievements of wealthy Chinese philanthropists is consistent with the interpretation that these Chinese businessmen were the leading beneficiaries of the colonial system in Singapore and its Malayan hinterland, and supports the argument that a simplistic characterisation of this system – a system with a cosmopolitan elite class at its centre – as merely *European* colonialism is problematic.

It should be no surprise if Chinese philanthropists provided the bulk of the charitable contributions in colonial Singapore, if most of the wealthy people in colonial Singapore were Chinese. The high-profile role of wealthy Chinese in charitable activity reflected both their great generosity and their remarkable success within the colonial system. Conspicuous philanthropy was one of the ways in which wealthy Asian and European elites objectified their elite status within the colonial social structure, and

---

<sup>211</sup> “Obituary: Tan Sri Dr. Lee Kong Chian,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Researches*, Volume 3 (December 1967), pp. 2-5; Victor Sim, editor, *Biographies of Prominent Chinese in Singapore* (1950), p. 5.

publicly confirmed their membership together in the multiracial elite class. At the same time, charitable activities surely gave these philanthropists a sense of personal satisfaction and accomplishment.

Wealthy Chinese capitalists and other Asian elites were at the core of the colonial system; they stood at the centre of the colonial society of Singapore, along with the European elites here. The leading Asian elites likely benefited more from the colonial system, both financially and symbolically, as measured in their consumption of status symbols (their prominence in public celebrations, and the number and size of their mansions) than did their European partners and allies in the colonial enterprise. Asian and European elites alike aspired to economic and symbolic success within the colonial system in Singapore,<sup>212</sup> and they depended at least in part upon close cooperation with one another to attain these rewards. The development of social connections and patterns of cooperative prestige-related interactions among Asian and European elites promoted the social cohesion of the cosmopolitan elite class and fostered a fertile context of acquaintanceships and reputations, a context which was conducive to the joint-ventures and partnerships which sustained the colonial economic system, and the personal economic and symbolic success of each of these elites.

### **The Increasing Complexity of the Social Structure Over Time**

The historical development of this elite class was characterised by an increasing elaboration, efflorescence, and formalisation of institutional connections and networks over time, as the array of imagery and institutions grew in richness, elaborateness, and

---

<sup>212</sup> Regarding the economic and symbolic benefits which Chinese elites in Singapore derived from the colonial system, see: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, p. 18. Regarding Europeans, see: John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia*, p. 77.

variety over the course of Singapore's colonial era, from 1819 to 1959. The increasing complexity of the institutionalised social structure of the multiracial elite class, with an increasing number of elite-led organisations, paralleled the steady increase in the population of the island; indeed, this institutional proliferation and *formalisation* of elite-level social connections may have reflected at least in part the fact that it must have become increasingly more difficult for elites to establish *informal* connections with *all* of their peers as their numbers increased with the steady growth of the island's population. The gradual increase in the number of prestigious organisations over time facilitated the mutual recognition of elite status by means of *formal* titles and memberships, in addition to the informal social connections which elites continued to cultivate, as the membership of their class grew in number. The efflorescence of imagery and the proliferation of institutions connected with the Asian and European members of the elite class occurred against the backdrop of international rivalries and challenges to the imperial order. The flowering and growing abundance of prestigious institutions, public imagery, and ceremonial events over time was brought about by, and also contributed to, the cooperative interaction between the members of the elite class, as they actively participated in these developments, creating institutions and status symbols and endowing them with prestige.

Membership and participation in the cosmopolitan elite class provided Asian and European elites with a rich source of social and symbolic benefits, as well as the connections, means, and opportunities for gaining substantial material or financial rewards. The elite Asians and Europeans who played the leading roles in this process of class formation and organisation, including businessmen, officeholders, and professional

people, as well as Malay rulers, were influential in that they possessed various forms of resources. For example, Chinese elites, the leaders of the largest ethnic group, controlled such resources as economic capital, linkages to Asian trading networks, access to the supply of labourers from China, and the unofficial political power of leadership and social capital within the Chinese community and its institutions. Other Asian businessmen, including Indians,<sup>213</sup> Arabs,<sup>214</sup> Jews,<sup>215</sup> Armenians,<sup>216</sup> and Parsis,<sup>217</sup> also

---

<sup>213</sup> Regarding wealthy Indians in Singapore, see, for example: Leslie Netto, *Passage of Indians*, and: Rajabali Jumabhoy, *Multiracial Singapore – On to the Nineties*. Regarding Moona Kader Sultan, the Indian Cattle King of Singapore, see: René Onraet, *Singapore – A Police Background*, pp. 8-11; *Malaya Tribune*, 9 June 1937, p. 20, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0005945; and: Sharon Siddique and Nirmala Puru Shotam, *Singapore’s Little India: Past, Present, and Future*, p. 58. Regarding Moona Kader Sultan’s mansion in Katong, called the Karikal Mahal, see: Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*, pp. 55 and 118. For information on the Chettiar community in Singapore, see: Hans-Dieter Evers and Jayarani Pavadarayan, “Religious Fervour and Economic Success: The Chettiars of Singapore,” in: K.S. Sandhu and A. Mani, editors, *Indian Communities in Southeast Asia*, pp. 847-865.

<sup>214</sup> Regarding wealthy Arabs in colonial Singapore, see: J.E. Nathan, *The Census of British Malaya (The Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States and Protected States of Johore, Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, Trengganu and Brunei) 1921*, p. 91, paragraph 339; Arnold Wright and H.A. Cartwright, editors, *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya (1908)*, p. 710; John Drysdale, *Singapore: Struggle for Success*, p. xv; Ulrike Freitag, “Arab Merchants in Singapore: Attempt of a Collective Biography,” and: William R. Roff, “Murder as an Aid to Social History: The Arabs in Singapore in the Early Twentieth Century,” in: Huub de Jonge and Nico Kaptein, editors, *Transcending Borders: Arabs, Politics, Trade and Islam in Southeast Asia*, pp. 109-142 and 91-108 respectively. See also: *Straits Times* 28 December 1899, p. 2, and 30 December 1899, p. 2, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016462. See also: *Straits Times*, 10 February 1887, quoted in: Brenda Yeoh, *Contesting Space*, p. 59.

<sup>215</sup> Regarding wealthy Jewish residents of colonial Singapore, see: J.E. Nathan, *The Census of British Malaya (The Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States and Protected States of Johore, Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, Trengganu and Brunei) 1921*, p. 91, paragraph 339; and: John Dill Ross, *The Capital of a Little Empire: A Descriptive Study of a British Crown Colony in the Far East (1898)* p. 69. Regarding Sir Manasseh Meyer, see: *Straits Times*, 3 November 1922, p. 9, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016597; Walter Makepeace, “Concerning Known Persons,” in: Walter Makepeace *et al.*, *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume Two, pp. 463-464; *British Malaya* magazine, April 1929, p. 316; *Malaya Tribune*, 1 July 1930, p. 9, R0005882; *British Malaya* magazine, August 1930, pp. 103-104; *Singapore Free Press*, 2 July 1930, p. 10, R0006210. Regarding leading Jewish residents of colonial Singapore, see also: Eze Nathan, *The History of Jews in Singapore 1830-1945*, and: Joan Bieder, *Jews of Singapore*.

<sup>216</sup> Regarding wealthy Armenians in nineteenth-century Singapore, many of whom were English-speaking, see: Nadia H. Wright, *Respected Citizens: The History of Armenians in Singapore and Malaysia*; and: Charles Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition, during the Years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842*, Ingram, Cooke, and Co., London, 1852, quoted in: John Bastin, *Travellers’ Singapore: An Anthology*, p. 52. Regarding prominent Armenian businessmen, see: C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*, p. 14; and: C.M. Turnbull, *Dateline Singapore*, pp. 10-15. See the references to the Sarkies brothers, the Armenian entrepreneurs who founded Raffles Hotel in 1887, in: Ilsa Sharp, *There is Only One Raffles: The Story of a Grand Hotel*, pp. 22-28.

<sup>217</sup> See the mention of wealthy Parsis in nineteenth-century Singapore, many of whom were English-speaking, in: Charles Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition, during the Years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842*, (London, 1852), quoted in: John Bastin, *Travellers’ Singapore: An Anthology*, p.



held economic capital, business expertise, and links to trading networks, as well as social leadership within their communities. The two Malay elites who were especially prominent in the social scene of colonial Singapore, Sultan Abu Bakar of Johore and his son, Sultan Ibrahim, held the prestige or symbolic capital of a Malay royal title that was recognised by the British government,<sup>218</sup> as well as leadership of groups of followers, which gave them a substantial degree of influence. European elites in the business world held economic capital and trading links with European markets and producers, while other, *official* European elites held political power within the colonial government, as well as official military and naval power.

The social order of colonial Singapore included both *official* and *unofficial* institutions and forms of authority and control, with a certain degree of correspondence to ethnic or racial groups; specifically, European colonial officials held most of the *official* authority, while wealthy Chinese businessmen held most of the *unofficial* authority.<sup>219</sup> Of course, the concept of authority is abstract and cannot be measured precisely, but general observations can still be made. Europeans held the highest leadership positions in the official institutions of the colonial administration, while Chinese leaders held leadership positions in a number of unofficial institutions, which were very important to the Chinese people of Singapore – such as the Chinese clan organisations and dialect

---

52. Regarding prominent Parsi businessmen, see: Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago: The Land of the Orang-Utan, and the Bird of Paradise. A Narrative of Travel, with Studies of Man and Nature*, p. 32; John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India* (1865) p. 135; and: C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*, p. 52.

<sup>218</sup> *Supplement to the Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1886, pp. 121-123, Government Notification No. 55, including the text of an Agreement between the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Frederick Arthur Stanley, and the Maharajah of Johore, dated 11 December 1885.

<sup>219</sup> On Chinese power in nineteenth-century Singapore, see: K.G. Tregonning, *The British in Malaya: The First Forty Years 1786-1826*, p. 158; Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, pp. 30, 47, 53, 61, 117, 273, and 274-275; Lea E. Williams, "Chinese Leadership in Early British Singapore," *Asian Studies*, Volume II, Number 2, August 1964, pp. 170-179; and: Paul Kratoska's Introduction to: The Rev. G.M. Reith, M.A., *Handbook to Singapore with Map*, republished in 1985, pp. vi-vii.

associations, and the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce, which was founded in 1906. Chinese secret societies were important unofficial institutions in the nineteenth century; C.F. Yong has noted that these societies were legal and respectable until the colonial government outlawed them in 1890.<sup>220</sup> Indeed, the colonial authorities actually worked with secret society leaders to preserve or restore order prior to the 1890 ban.<sup>221</sup>

Meanwhile, it should be noted that the Chinese elites did not enjoy an absolute monopoly on unofficial power, nor did the European elites possess an absolute monopoly on official power. Some Chinese and other Asian elites held certain public offices – for example, as Municipal Commissioners and as Members of the Legislative Council, as well as seats on a number of official boards, including the Singapore Harbour Board, the Singapore Rural Board, the Board of Trustees of the Singapore Improvement Trust, and the Chinese, Mohammedan, Sikh, and Hindu Advisory Boards.<sup>222</sup> Regarding non-Chinese institutions outside of colonial officialdom, European businessmen led the Singapore Chamber of Commerce, while various non-Chinese Asian groups formed their own institutions, such as the Chettiar Chamber of Commerce,<sup>223</sup> the Indian Chamber of Commerce, the Eurasian Association, the Malay Volunteer Club, and the Japanese Planters Association, to name only a few examples.<sup>224</sup>

---

<sup>220</sup> C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, pp. xvi and 293-294. In 1846, a secret society leader named Tan Tek Hye wrote a letter to a local newspaper, the *Singapore Free Press*; see: Carl A. Trocki, *Prince of Pirates*, p. 101.

<sup>221</sup> Edwin Lee, *The British As Rulers: Governing Multiracial Singapore 1867-1914*, pp. 38, 42, 94-95, 98-99, 127, 135-137, and 288. See also C.F. Yong, *op. cit.*, pp. 293-294.

<sup>222</sup> For lists of the Asian and European members of these official institutions, see, for example: *The Singapore and Malayan Directory for 1940*, pp. 996, 980, 1004, 1006, and 982-983 respectively.

<sup>223</sup> See the mention of the establishment of the Chettiar Chamber of Commerce in 1931, in: Hans-Dieter Evers and Jayarani Pavadarayan, "Religious Fervour and Economic Success: The Chettiars of Singapore," in: K.S. Sandhu and A. Mani, editors, *Indian Communities in Southeast Asia*, p. 856.

<sup>224</sup> The Indian Chamber of Commerce, the Eurasian Association, the Japanese Planters Association, and the Malay Volunteer Club are mentioned, for example, in: *The Singapore and Malayan Directory for 1940*, pp. 1011, 1024, 1025, and 1026 respectively.

The community of elite Asians and Europeans was integrated thanks at least in part to their mutual and natural craving for symbolic capital, by whatever names they knew it.<sup>225</sup> As Anthony Milner has explained that the traditional Malay political system was *activated* through the pursuit of *nama*<sup>226</sup> – that is, of rank and reputation – so too were the members of the multiracial elite class in colonial Singapore integrated through their mutual pursuit of symbolic capital. This socially integrating allocation of symbolic capital occurred not only along the vertical lines of integration through honours conferred by monarchs (as described in Anthony Milner’s book *Kerajaan* and David Cannadine’s book *Ornamentalism*), but also along *horizontal* lines, as elites associated with one another and cooperated in helping each other to enhance their prestige. This process may be understood with reference to the concept of the *social game*,<sup>227</sup> as well as to William Goode’s concepts of *prestige process*, *prestige economy*, and *prestige community*.<sup>228</sup>

---

<sup>225</sup> On the human need for social recognition, status, or prestige, see: Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*, pp. 37-38; William J. Goode, *The Celebration of Heroes: Prestige as a Social Control System*, p. vii; and: Robert W. Fuller, *Somebodies and Nobodies: Overcoming the Abuse of Rank*, pp. 46, 48, 49, and 56. On the psychological need for prestige in the value system of Chinese merchants in colonial Singapore, and the relationship between their display of wealth (including mansions and gardens) to their acquisition of prestige, see: Yen Ching-hwang, “Ch’ing’s Sale of Honours and the Chinese Leadership in Singapore and Malaya (1877-1912),” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Volume 1, Number 2 (September 1970), pp. 26-32. Regarding perceptions of honour and prestige among Westerners, see: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, esp. Chapters 10, 11, 13, and 17, pp. 114-124, 143, and 175; see also: John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia*, pp. 77, 170, 171-172, 226, and 227. Regarding *nama*, see: Anthony Milner, *Kerajaan: Malay Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule*, especially pp. xvi, 104, 105, and 106. Regarding *face* or *mien-tzu* (also spelled *mianzi*), see, for example: P. Christopher Earley, *Face, Harmony, and Social Structure: An Analysis of Organizational Behaviour across Cultures*, pp. 36-38, 42-79, and 212-213.

<sup>226</sup> Regarding activation, see: Anthony Milner, *Kerajaan*, p. 114. Compare with: Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*, pp. 102, 120, and 123.

<sup>227</sup> Regarding the concept of a *social game*, see: E. Digby Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class*, pp. 11-12; Peter Burke, *The Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society in Italy*, p. 194; Norton E. Long, “The Local Community as an Ecology of Games,” *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (November 1958), p. 261; David Silverman, *The Theory of Organisations: A Sociological Framework*, pp. 210-212; and: Harvey Warren Zorbaugh, *The Gold Coast and the Slum: A Sociological Study of Chicago’s Near North Side*, pp. 49-64 and 279. See also the mention of the *game of honour* in: Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, p. 22.

<sup>228</sup> See: William J. Goode, *The Celebration of Heroes: Prestige as a Social Control System*, especially pp. 209-211, and also pp. vii-x, 6, 13-18, 31, 33, 40, 41, 50, 93-95, 98, 101, 103, 110, 114, 116-117, 119-120,

Elites played a social game involving the cultivation of social connections and the enhancement of status and prestige. As these elites interacted, they cooperated to create organisations, titles, traditions, rituals, and histories, and to invest these artefacts with symbolic capital; thanks to their efforts, these social commodities carried prestige value in the local social context – for example, the name of Raffles, which was and is much more important here in Singapore than anywhere else. Elites enhanced their prestige by associating and interacting together, giving each other honour and status. As they played this social game, they sustained their community of prestige – a socially cohesive cosmopolitan or multiracial elite class, integrated by reciprocal exchanges of symbolic capital. These exchanges of prestige bridged the differences between people of different races, cultures, languages, and occupational backgrounds.

The approach of this study might seem, at first glance, to be quite similar to the approach of David Cannadine in his book *Ornamentalism*, since this study shares Cannadine’s interest in elites and the symbolic capital of royal honours and ceremonies; however, this first impression is deceptive. Simply put, this study is mainly concerned with interactions among elites on a *horizontal* social plane, while *Ornamentalism* is mainly concerned with vertical or hierarchical elite interactions. The formation and enhancement of social connections (or social capital) among fellow elites by means of social exchanges of symbolic resources on a *horizontal* social plane – that is, between fellow elites who enjoyed similar levels of social status and interacted on approximately the same level of prestige – was at least as important in the society of colonial Singapore as the *hierarchical* or *vertical* social interactions described in *Ornamentalism*, such as the

---

125, 133, 151-152, and 180. The term *community of prestige* used in this study was inspired by William Goode’s concept of the *prestige community* (pp. 209-212).

conferral of royal honours upon elite subjects, and the expressions of allegiance given by these elites to their monarchs. Exchanges of symbolic capital among the Asian and European elites affirmed their proximity with one another in their shared elite *social space*.<sup>229</sup>

While vertical, top-down social interactions require that some sort of hierarchy or social structure must already be in place before the interaction can begin, interactions among fellow elites on a horizontal status plane serve the social function of creating the hierarchy in the first place, and placing these elites at the hierarchy's apex, by creating a sense of a cohesive, socially-integrated and self-conscious elite class at the centre of the society. An elite individual would naturally derive greater prestige and ego-satisfaction from being honoured by someone he regards as a fellow elite (even an elite of a different race) than from someone he regards as his social inferior, even if that person is of his own race. The publicly-visible cooperative interaction and mutual recognition of shared elite status among these Asian and European elites, and their conspicuous association with one another and with mutually-recognised status symbols, positioned them within the same social circle or rank as an elite class. Their cooperative and complementary efforts to display and represent their prestigious status to the general public through celebrations, rituals, and publications, effectively placed their class at the centre of the colonial society,

---

<sup>229</sup> Regarding the concept of *social space*, see: Pierre Bourdieu, "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups," *Theory and Society*, Vol. 14, No. 6 (November 1985), pp. 723-744; Pierre Bourdieu, "What Makes a Social Class? On The Theoretical and Practical Existence Of Groups," in: *Berkeley Journal of Sociology: A Critical Review*, Volume XXXII, 1987, Department of Sociology, University of California, Berkeley, p. 7; Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Space," in: Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*, pp. 1-13; Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power," in: *Sociological Theory*, Volume 7, Number 1 (Spring 1989), pp. 14-25; Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," Translated by Richard Nice, in: John G. Richardson, ed., *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, p. 249; and: David Swartz, *Culture & Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*, pp. 146 and 153-154.

the social summit from which the rest of the ranks or gradations of the social hierarchy could be measured and defined.

Through their cooperative interaction with one another, including the *social exchange*<sup>230</sup> of various social resources, Asian and European elites created and enhanced the social ties among them, which linked them together into an ethnically diverse elite class. Along the way, they also sustained and increased their influence by acquiring and retaining economic capital in the form of wealth and property, as well as by enhancing their social capital of influential social connections and enriching their symbolic capital of prestige, honour, and status. The formation and development of this cosmopolitan elite class may be seen as key factors in the process by which influential Asian and Europeans cooperated to accomplish the social, political, and economic development of colonial Singapore and its Malayan hinterland for their mutual benefit.

The social history of the multiracial elite class in Singapore should be of interest to anyone who studies the colonial era here, not only because the members of this class were responsible for making economic and political decisions which affected everyone else, but also because it was at the elite level that the different cultural and racial sectors of the population were brought together – thus, it is because of the interactions of elites that it is possible to speak of a *society* in colonial Singapore, rather than *societies*. Asian and European here elites *did* regularly meet outside of the marketplace, in contrast to the

---

<sup>230</sup> Regarding the concept of *social exchange*, see: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter XI, seventh paragraph; Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, pp. 387 and 389; Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, p. 175; Marcel Mauss, *The Gift (Essai sur le don)*, p. 10 and 11; Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship (Les Structures Élémentaires de la Parenté)*, pp. 59-60 and 68; Peter M. Blau, *Exchange and Power in Social Life*, pp. 4, 89, 92, and 107; Alvin W. Gouldner, “The Norm of Reciprocity: A Preliminary Statement,” *American Sociological Review*, Volume 25, Number 2 (April 1960), pp. 161-178; William J. Goode, *The Celebration of Heroes: Prestige as a Social Control System*, pp. x, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 26, 31, 33, 40, 41, and 42-43; Peter P. Ekeh, *Social Exchange Theory: The Two Traditions*; and: Pierre Bourdieu, “The Economy of Symbolic Goods,” in: *Practical Reason*, pp. 100 and 104.

*plural societies* of colonial Burma and Java, as described by J.S. Furnivall.<sup>231</sup> Of course, the society of colonial Singapore was plural, but it was plural in a way which did not quite conform to Furnivall's famous definition of the plural colonial society. Using Furnivall's terminology, it might be more correct to describe the elite society of colonial Singapore as having been characterised by some *plural features*,<sup>232</sup> rather than being a *plural society* in the full sense of Furnivall's term. Alternatively, it might be even better to simply redefine the concept of the plural colonial society, into what may be described as a revised, non-Furnivallian definition, one which would appreciate that even a plural colonial society could have a degree of interracial social integration, at least at the elite level.

This social historical approach to the history of elite class formation through the cooperation and partnership between Asian and European elites in Singapore is an approach which is intended to complement other historical accounts by a number of authors who have described economic and political cooperation between Asians and Europeans here. The term *partnership* has been employed with regard to relations between Chinese and European businessmen in the context of colonial Singapore or Malaya in the works of K. G. Tregonning, Wong Lin Ken, Lee Poh Ping, and Loh Wei Leng.<sup>233</sup> Ernest C. T. Chew has emphasised the importance of giving due credit to the

---

<sup>231</sup> Regarding J.S. Furnivall's conception of the *plural society*, see: J.S. Furnivall, *Netherlands India: A Study of Plural Economy*, pp. 446 and 449; and: J.S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice*, pp. 303-305. In *Colonial Policy and Practice*, on pp. 303 and 305, Furnivall applied the concept of the *plural society* to other colonies in Asia.

<sup>232</sup> Regarding *plural features*, see: J.S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice*, p. 305.

<sup>233</sup> See the mentions of *partnership* in: K.G. Tregonning, *Home Port Singapore: A History of Straits Steamship Company Limited 1890-1965*, p. 6; Wong Lin Ken, "Commercial Growth before the Second World War," in: Ernest C.T. Chew and Edwin Lee, eds., *A History of Singapore*, p. 62; Lee Poh Ping, *Chinese Society in Nineteenth Century Singapore*, p. 37; Loh Wei Leng, "The Colonial State And Business: The Policy Environment in Malaya in the Inter-War Years," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 33 (2) (June 2002), p. 255.

early Asian and European settlers who, along with William Farquhar and John Crawfurd, actually built Singapore following the founding of the colonial settlement here by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles in 1819.<sup>234</sup> Economic cooperation between Asian and European businessmen in Singapore and its Malayan hinterland has been described in the works of K. G. Tregonning, Wang Gungwu, Wong Lin Ken, Chiang Hai Ding, and W. G. Huff.<sup>235</sup> Mutually-beneficial relationships between Chinese and Western banks in Singapore has been described in the works of Yap Pheng Geck and Lee Sheng-Yi.<sup>236</sup>

C.F. Yong has noted that Chinese leaders in Singapore assisted the colonial authorities in governmental matters and in the prevention and suppression of disorder; these Chinese leaders benefited from the colonial order in terms of receiving honours and titles from the colonial authorities, as well as by enjoying political and social stability, which was useful for achieving success in business.<sup>237</sup> Carl Trocki has described how Malay leaders accommodated Europeans and Chinese while supervising the development

---

<sup>234</sup> Ernest C.T. Chew, "The Foundation of a British Settlement," in: Ernest C.T. Chew and Edwin Lee, eds., *A History of Singapore*, pp. 36-40; see p. 38.

<sup>235</sup> K. G. Tregonning, *Straits Tin: A Brief Account of the First Seventy-Five Years of The Straits Trading Company, Limited. 1887-1962*, especially pp. 18 and 26-27; and: *Home Port Singapore: A History of Straits Steamship Company Limited 1890-1965*, esp. pp. 6, 17-18, 39, and 67; K. G. Tregonning mentions cooperation between Asian elites and Europeans in "The Historical Background," in: Ooi Jin-Bee and Chiang Hai Ding, eds. *Modern Singapore*, p. 15; Wang Gungwu, "The Chinese as Immigrants and Settlers: Singapore," in: Wang Gungwu, *China and the Chinese Overseas*, pp. 166-178, especially p. 169; Wong Lin Ken, "The Trade of Singapore, 1819-69," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 33, Part 4, No. 192 (December 1960), p. 163, and Wong Lin Ken, "Commercial Growth before the Second World War," in: Ernest C.T. Chew and Edwin Lee, eds., *A History of Singapore*, pp. 41-65, especially pp. 60-62; Chiang Hai Ding, "Sino-British Mercantile Relations In Singapore's Entrepôt Trade 1870-1915," in: Jerome Ch'en and Nicholas Tarling, eds., *Studies in the Social History of China and South-East Asia: Essays in Memory of Victor Purcell*, pp. 247-266, esp. pp. 255 and 260-265; W. G. Huff, *The Economic Growth of Singapore*, pp. 63 and 206; W.G. Huff, "The Development of the Rubber Market in Pre-World War II Singapore," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Volume 24, Number 2 (September 1993), pp. 285-306.

<sup>236</sup> Yap Pheng Geck, *Scholar, Banker, Gentleman Soldier: The Reminiscences of Dr. Yap Pheng Geck*, pp. 36-37; Lee Sheng-Yi, *The Monetary and Banking Development of Malaysia and Singapore*, p. 70.

<sup>237</sup> C. F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, pp. xxvi, xxviii, 13-16, 18, 76, 294-295, 299-300, 305.



of Singapore's immediate Malayan hinterland;<sup>238</sup> Trocki has explained that the politics of colonial Singapore may be characterised by the terms *joint venture*, *joint enterprise*, *partnership*, and *cooperation* between Asian and European merchants and the British administration.<sup>239</sup> Yong Mun Cheong has remarked upon the link between interracial solidarity and economic interests.<sup>240</sup> Eunice Thio has shown how Asians and Europeans based in Singapore were economically involved in Singapore's Malayan hinterland.<sup>241</sup> Edwin Lee has explained how the colonial authorities endeavoured to establish or preserve order in Singapore by working with Asian elites, including aristocratic Malay leaders, Asian businessmen of various ethnic groups, Chinese secret society leaders before these societies were outlawed in 1890, and, beginning in the 1890s, the Queen's Scholars who were educated in the Western tradition.<sup>242</sup>

Together, the historical works of these authors present a picture of how Asian and European elites in colonial Singapore worked together over time, especially with regard to economic and political interaction. The social historical approach of this study, centred on the social cooperation of Asian and European elite to establish and sustain the social networks of a cosmopolitan elite class and the role of pageantry, public imagery, and symbolic capital in this process, thus takes an approach which differs from economically or politically oriented approaches, and endeavours to contribute to the completeness of the overall picture by emphasising the existence of the cosmopolitan

---

<sup>238</sup> Carl A. Trocki, *Prince of Pirates: The Temenggongs and the Development of Johor and Singapore 1784-1885*, p. xx.

<sup>239</sup> Carl A. Trocki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control*, p. 76.

<sup>240</sup> Yong Mun Cheong, "Some Thoughts on Modernization and Race Relations in the Political History of Singapore," in: Yong Mun Cheong, ed. *Asian Traditions and Modernization: Perspectives from Singapore*, p. 66.

<sup>241</sup> Eunice Thio, "The Extension of British Control to Pahang," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 30, Part 1 (May 1957), pp. 46-74.

<sup>242</sup> Edwin Lee, *The British As Rulers: Governing Multiracial Singapore 1867-1914*. See esp. pp. 288-291.

elite class and the importance of symbols, imagery, and symbolic capital to the existence and social capital of this class. This approach to the social history of the elite class sets out to show how Asian and European elites established and sustained the social linkages which gave cohesion to their class as a cosmopolitan community of elites, a community which provided the social setting within which they engaged in the patterns of economic and political cooperation described by the historians listed above.

### **Emphasising the Role of Asian Elites in Colonial Singapore**

It must be emphasised that, while this study is concerned with colonial elites, it is most certainly *not* limited to an account focused on the activities of Europeans in a colonial setting in Southeast Asia; rather, this study is concerned with the activities of a cosmopolitan, multiracial elite class of influential individuals, including Asians and Europeans alike, the institutions to which they belonged, and how they formed and organised their elite class. Wu Xiao An has persuasively emphasised the participation, interaction, and interdependence of Asian and European elites in colonial-era Malaya.<sup>243</sup> As Carl Trocki has pointed out that it would be wrong to assume that Malay leaders had merely passive or reactionary roles in the colonial history of Singapore and Johore,<sup>244</sup> so too would it be wrong to describe the Chinese and other Asian elites in colonial Singapore as having been anything less than active participants and leaders in the social, economic, and political development of this island. The building of Singapore was a joint effort of Asians and Europeans, supervised by a cosmopolitan elite class. Cosmopolitan, multiracial and ethnically diverse populations were typical characteristics

---

<sup>243</sup> Regarding the problem of compartmentalisation and the importance of multiethnic interactions in colonial-era Malaya, see: Wu Xiao An, *Chinese Business in the Making of a Malay State, 1882-1941: Kedah and Penang*, pp. 4, 6, 10, 181-182, and 187.

<sup>244</sup> Carl A. Trocki, *Prince of Pirates*, p. xx.

or features of colonial port cities, of which Singapore was such an outstanding example. Moreover, the elite class was just as much divided by differences in ethnic and racial identities and cultural backgrounds as was the general population; so, these elites needed to establish social bonds and networks to overcome these differences and create the social order of a cohesive elite class, to serve their interests in working together. These Asian and European elites enjoyed the mutual benefits of their profitable cooperative relationship or partnership, benefits which involved economic, social, and symbolic rewards or profits.<sup>245</sup>

The Europeans of colonial Singapore were a tiny minority within a population which was predominantly composed of Asians; therefore, the Europeans needed to cooperate with Asians, and especially with elite Asians, in order to bring about the development of Singapore as a colonial port city and entrepot, a trading centre and a staple port for tin and rubber exports.<sup>246</sup> Moreover, Europeans depended upon Chinese capitalists and labourers to bring about the development of Singapore's Malayan hinterland, as explained by no less an authority than Sir Hugh Clifford, who also noted that Chinese capitalists living in the Straits Settlements controlled the Chinese tin miners in the Malay Peninsula.<sup>247</sup> The Asians who came to Singapore brought with them valuable skills and connections with social and trading networks. Asians also controlled crucial financial capital – many of the wealthiest individuals in colonial Singapore were

---

<sup>245</sup> Regarding the economic and symbolic benefits which Chinese elites in Singapore derived from the colonial system, see: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, p. 18.

<sup>246</sup> Regarding the terms *entrepot* and *staple port*, see: W. G. Huff, *The Economic Growth of Singapore*, pp. 8 and 14-23.

<sup>247</sup> Sir Hugh Clifford, "A Lesson from the Malay States," *The Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 84, No. 505 (November 1899), pp. 599 and 592. Regarding the control of the supply of Chinese labourers and the Chinese tin miners in Singapore's Malayan hinterland by Chinese capitalists, see: Wong Lin Ken, "Western Enterprise and the Development of the Malayan Tin Industry to 1914," in: C. D. Cowan, ed., *The Economic Development of South-East Asia: Studies in Economic History and Political Economy*, pp. 132, 138, 139, and 147.

Asians.<sup>248</sup> This fact was reflected in a claim in the *Straits Times* in 1885 that wealthy Chinese had already bought up all of the best sites for country estates in Singapore.<sup>249</sup> When Oei Tiong Ham died at his home in Dalvey Road in Singapore in 1924, the *Malaya Tribune* described him as Asia's richest man.<sup>250</sup> Tan Kah Kee, a Singapore-based philanthropist and leader of the rubber planting and manufacturing industry, was reputed to be the richest businessman in Malaya *circa* 1928.<sup>251</sup> On the other hand, it has also been claimed that an Arab merchant and shipowner named Sâlim ibn Tâlib, might well have been the richest man in Singapore in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>252</sup> While there may be some disagreement over who was the richest individual in Singapore at this time, it seems clear that the only contenders for this honour were Asians.

Asian elites also benefited from cooperation with the Europeans, in terms of material, social, and symbolic resources. Asians and Europeans needed to work together in order to maximise their opportunities for the achievement of economic and social success, so it was in their interest to establish and enhance their social connections with one another. Membership in the cosmopolitan elite class was a mutually beneficial relationship for elite Asians and Europeans alike within the colonial order.

In the cosmopolitan Asian port city that was colonial Singapore, the social and political cohesion of the elite class could not be founded on shared national or racial identity, shared cultural or religious identity, or other such shared identities. However, there were some interests which these Asian and European elites held in common: they

---

<sup>248</sup> C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*, p. 113.

<sup>249</sup> *Straits Times*, 16 May 1885, p. 2, R0016433.

<sup>250</sup> *Malaya Tribune*, 4 June 1924, p. 7.

<sup>251</sup> Charles Robequain, *Malaya, Indonesia, Borneo, and the Philippines*, p. 121.

<sup>252</sup> Ulrike Freitag, "Arab Merchants in Singapore: Attempt of a Collective Biography," in: Huub de Jonge and Nico Kaptein, editors, *Transcending Borders: Arabs, Politics, Trade and Islam in Southeast Asia*, p. 117.

shared motivations to acquire economic resources, social capital, and such symbolic goods as prestige, honours, and status, and they also shared an interest in upholding the order and security that were the prerequisites for their achievement and enjoyment of financial, social, and symbolic success. So, especially at the elite level, exchanges of prestige and public imagery and the establishment of social connections were crucial factors in building, sustaining, and strengthening the bonds and cohesion of the colonial and imperial social order.

The members of this cosmopolitan elite class were socially bonded together and unified into a community of elites as they participated in the same ceremonies, accepted the same honours and distinctions, belonged to the same institutions, engaged in social exchanges, and cooperated in the development of new traditions, shared social memories, and colonial public imagery. These activities reinforced one another – the process of social exchange itself was supported and reinforced through the evolution of new traditions and public imagery of the colonial social order, which provided the symbolic goods and social resources for exchange over the course of Singapore's colonial history. This social exchange was a reciprocal process which provided mutual social benefits for the institutions and individuals involved, and involved the evolution over time of public rituals, ceremonies, spectacles, monuments, buildings, and myths or legends. These examples of colonial public imagery and new traditions enhanced the prestige, honour, status, and legitimacy of the institutions involved, and of those influential Asian and European individuals as they cooperated in patterns of social exchange, promotion of shared social memories, new traditions and public imagery, legitimation of the colonial

social order, and the social integration of the multiracial elite class into a cohesive cosmopolitan community of elites.

The history of the cooperative relationship between influential Asians and Europeans in Singapore began with the founding of modern Singapore in 1819, when Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, the Lieutenant Governor of Fort Marlborough at Bencoolen, and Agent to the Governor-General of India, concluded agreements here with two elite Malays: Temenggong Abdul Rahman and Sultan Hussein.<sup>253</sup> These agreements involved an exchange of social resources, in which the Asians and the European validated and legitimated the legal and political status of one another, as well as the institutions which each man represented – the Sultan and the Temenggong represented a Malay *kerajaan* or polity, while Raffles represented the East India Company which then ruled India. Specifically, in the second and third articles of the treaty of 6<sup>th</sup> February 1819, the East India Company entered into an alliance the Sultan and the Temenggong and agreed to provide these Malay leaders with protection and annual subsidies, while the eighth article of the treaty placed the port of Singapore under British protection and regulation. These agreements began a cooperative relationship between generations of Europeans here and the family of the Temenggong, a family which later became the ruling dynasty of Johore; Temenggong Abdul Rahman's grandson, Abu Bakar, was recognised as Sultan of Johore

---

<sup>253</sup> For information on the agreements made in Singapore in 1819 between the Malay leaders and Raffles, see: Ernest C.T. Chew, "The Foundation of a British Settlement," in: Ernest C.T. Chew and Edwin Lee, eds., *A History of Singapore*, pp. 36-37. See also: C.H. Wake, "Raffles and the Rajas: The Founding of Singapore in Malayan and British Colonial History," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 48, Part 1 (May 1975), pp. 47-73, esp. pp. 56 and 58-61. The preliminary agreement made between the Temenggong and Raffles on 30 January 1819 may be found in Charles Burton Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, p. 36, while the treaty of 6 February 1819 between the Sultan, the Temenggong, and Raffles is in Buckley, pp. 38-40.

in 1885 by the British government,<sup>254</sup> and this title has been held by his descendents ever since. Over time, this cooperative relationship or partnership proved to be mutually beneficial and profitable, both to this Malay dynasty and to the Europeans who cooperated with them, as well as to Chinese business interests in Singapore and Johore.<sup>255</sup>

The cooperative relationship between Malay leaders, Europeans, and Chinese was closely related to the development of the modern state of Johore, an important area within colonial Singapore's Malayan hinterland. Following the conclusion of the agreements between Temenggong Abdul Rahman, Sultan Hussein, and Lieutenant Governor Raffles, Asian and European businessmen settled in Singapore and formed the beginning of a local business elite. The agreements concluded with the Malay elites in 1819 were just the first steps in the history of elite-level interracial cooperation in Singapore, which involved patterns of social exchange and the evolution of new traditions and public imagery that became increasingly elaborate over time. Raffles made arrangements regarding Chinese and other Asian elites, recognising their status and initiating a cooperative relationship or partnership between Asian and European elites. In 1822, Raffles issued instructions which included a provision for the official recognition of Chinese leaders who would exercise authority over the Chinese population of Singapore, and in 1823, he informed Asian and European merchants that he expected Singapore to always remain a free port; in addition, he issued a Proclamation in 1823 which specified

---

<sup>254</sup> *Supplement to the Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1886, pp. 121-123, Government Notification No. 55, including the text of an Agreement between the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Frederick Arthur Stanley, and the Maharajah of Johore, dated 11 December 1885.

<sup>255</sup> For the history of the interactions between the Temenggongs and Sultans, the Europeans, and the Chinese in the development of Singapore's immediate Malayan hinterland, see: Carl A. Trocki, *Prince of Pirates: The Temenggongs and the Development of Johor and Singapore 1784-1885*.

that the government should respect Asian customs and regard all men as having equality before the law.<sup>256</sup> Meanwhile, Chinese and European businessmen developed a mutually beneficial symbiotic relationship in the entrepot trade.<sup>257</sup> When the Singapore Chamber of Commerce was founded in 1837, its Committee was multiracial and included four Asians, specifically two Chinese, an Arab, and an Armenian, as well as several Europeans and an American.<sup>258</sup> Cooperation among elite Asians and Europeans, including the establishment of institutions and business partnerships and the creation of public imagery, promoted the social integration of the cosmopolitan elite class, reinforced the social order of colonial Singapore, and defined the nature of that order as one characterised by cooperation among an ethnically diverse and cosmopolitan community of elites.

---

<sup>256</sup> See the texts of the instructions, the letter Raffles wrote to the merchants, and his Proclamation, in Charles Burton Buckley, *An Anecdotal History*, pp. 84, 109, and 115.

<sup>257</sup> Wong Lin Ken, "The Trade of Singapore, 1819-69," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 33, Part 4, No. 192 (December 1960), p. 163, and Wong Lin Ken, "Commercial Growth before the Second World War," in: Ernest C.T. Chew and Edwin Lee, eds., *A History of Singapore*, pp. 41-65, especially pp. 60-62. Regarding the *economic* symbiosis of Chinese and Westerners in colonial Southeast Asia, G. William Skinner, "Creolized Chinese Societies in Southeast Asia," in: Anthony Reid, editor, with the assistance of Kristine Alilunas Rodgers, *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese: In Honour of Jennifer Cushman*, p. 79.

<sup>258</sup> Charles Buckley, *An Anecdotal History*, p. 314; see also the mention of Isaiah Zechariah on p. 283.



**Chapter Two:**

**Concepts and Approaches: Public Pageantry, Rituals, Icons, and Conspicuous Recreation**

This study concentrates on aspects of the colonial past which might at first glance seem to belong merely to the peripheral or ornamental trappings of the colonial past, or the propagandistic displays and window-dressing of an imperial system; however, these ornamental trappings were actually quite important in the creation of social reality, and so deserve attention and study. Specifically, the following is an analysis of certain features of the colonial past, such as public pageantry, rituals, icons, and recreational activities, which are viewed here not only as examples of the public imagery of the colonial social order, or of what Thorstein Veblen so famously termed *conspicuous consumption*,<sup>1</sup> but, more importantly, as the means by which Asian and European elites cooperated to create and sustain the integration of their cosmopolitan elite class through the acquisition, sustenance, enhancement, and exchange of social and symbolic capital. Pageantry, rituals, and icons performed crucial functions, since they reinforced and facilitated the cooperation between Asian and European elites and enhanced the social reality of the elite class as a cohesive social entity. The cooperation of the ethnically diverse elite class was essential to the success and persistence of the colonial order, as well as the personal success of Asian and European elites in acquiring economic, symbolic, and social capital, including wealth, prestige, and connections.

This social historical approach has been influenced and inspired by the consideration of public pageantry, imagery, and ceremonies in the historical works of

---

<sup>1</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*, pp. 68-101.

Eric Hobsbawm,<sup>2</sup> David Cannadine,<sup>3</sup> Bernard S. Cohn,<sup>4</sup> Takashi Fujitani,<sup>5</sup> and Maurizio Peleggi.<sup>6</sup> Although this study will consider the ways in which elites employed public ceremonies and symbolic capital to support and legitimate the established order by presenting a certain type of image of this order, this is actually not the focus of this study; instead, this social historical approach focuses on the ways in which Asian and European elites cooperated in the use of public imagery and symbolic capital to create and sustain the networks of social bonds which constituted and defined the cosmopolitan elite class as a social entity. The emphasis here is thus on the process of elite class formation and development.

The type of elite class which appeared and flourished in colonial Singapore must not be taken for granted as something which was natural or to have been expected, but rather as an artificial construct, considering that this elite class was made up of people who were divided into a variety of groups along the lines of their very different cultural and racial backgrounds. The elite class of colonial Singapore could not base its unity, solidarity, or cohesion upon any shared sense of ancestral culture, ancient history, or racial homogeneity among all of the elites as a group. Therefore, whatever social bonds and cohesion which linked these elites together into a class had to be built by them from the ground up, without reliance upon a shared national or cultural background. The elite class here was thus invented after Singapore was founded as a colonial settlement in 1819.

---

<sup>2</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions" and "Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914," in: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, pp. 1-14 and 263-307.

<sup>3</sup> David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*; and "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition', c. 1820-1977," in: Hobsbawm and Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, pp. 101-164.

<sup>4</sup> Bernard S. Cohn, "Representing Authority in Victorian India," in: Hobsbawm and Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, pp. 165-209.

<sup>5</sup> Takashi Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan*.

<sup>6</sup> Maurizio Peleggi, *Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image*.

### *Concepts and Approaches*

Public pageantry and rituals provided opportunities for social connections, prestige, and status to be created by being made publicly known and socially real, both to those people who participated in these events or observed them as spectators, as well as to those who read reports of these events in either the Chinese-language or English-language Singapore newspapers. Such public displays and newspaper reports publicly identified the Asian and European elites, confirmed their social rank, and helped make them socially real. For example, newspapers published lists of names of people who were invited to receptions at Government House, as well as the names of people who served on committees which organised public celebrations. In addition, pageantry and the press showed that these elites interacted and cooperated with each other, and thus asserted that they were socially linked to one another as members of a cosmopolitan elite class. Asian and European elites needed to sustain their networks of cooperative relationships throughout the colonial era in order for them to work together to bring about social order and economic development for their mutual benefit. The interaction of Asian and European elites was an important element of the *public life* of colonial Singapore, as these elites publicly demonstrated and affirmed their shared membership in the elite class through public pageantry and symbolism, and through reports in the Chinese-language and English-language press.

Clearly, the elite class of colonial Singapore included Asians as well as Europeans, considering the ample evidence of the prestige, status, and wealth of the Asian elites, who provided so much of the leadership and capital for the development of Singapore over the years. This is not an attempt to romanticise or idealise elites; however, every state, society, or polity has an elite class of some kind, and the members

of these classes lead and direct their societies, whether for good or for ill – therefore, the role of elites is clearly central to social history. In the case of an ethnically diverse society such as colonial Singapore, the cosmopolitan elite class brought the different elements of society together to some extent, and provided social order, coordination, and a degree of social unity and cohesion, at least at the elite level.

### **Social Capital, Symbolic Capital, and Social Reality**

The terms *social capital*, *symbolic capital*, and *social reality* are essential concepts in the exploration of the social history of elites and the development of the elite class. The three terms provide useful conceptual tools for the consideration of social interactions and institutions which underpin a social order. The different forms of capital are featured prominently in the work of Pierre Bourdieu.<sup>7</sup> Although they may be described as non-material resources, social and symbolic capital are as valuable and as socially real as the economic capital of material wealth or property. The use of the word *capital* emphasises their functions as valuable commodities or resources which, like material wealth or economic capital, may be accumulated, depleted, and exchanged, and which may serve as prizes or rewards to motivate behaviour. These forms of capital are basically types of *power*, something which exists in a variety of guises, as Pierre Bourdieu<sup>8</sup> and Thomas Hobbes explained.<sup>9</sup>

Interests in economic, social, and symbolic capital provide powerful motivations for both conflict and cooperation, as well as for the formation of connections and social bonds. While the importance of economic factors in the motivation of social behaviour

---

<sup>7</sup> I am grateful to A/P Maurizio Peleggi for prompting me to read some of Bourdieu's works in 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," (originally titled "Okonomisches Kapital, kulturelles Kapital, soziales Kapital"), in: John G. Richardson, ed., *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, especially p. 243.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapters X, XI, XIII, and XVII, pp. 114, 123, 143, and 175.

may go without saying, the significance of social and symbolic capital as motivating factors for historical developments in social order deserves attention in the study of history, alongside conventional historical works emphasising political, economic, and strategic or military factors. Indeed, the pursuit of economic or political rewards may actually result from the urge to acquire symbolic capital, specifically the prestige, status, and recognition that accompany wealth and political power, influence, and position. Thinking in terms of social and symbolic capital, as well as social reality, is useful in exploring the social history of the interaction and integration of the Asian and European members of the elite class in colonial Singapore – how and why these elites interacted over time.

The concept of *social capital* is probably most closely synonymous with the idea of *connections* among people. The term *social capital* apparently originated in the second decade of the twentieth century – L.J. Hanifan used the term in an article published in 1916.<sup>10</sup> By the dawn of the twenty-first century, Pierre Bourdieu,<sup>11</sup> James Coleman,<sup>12</sup> Robert Putnam,<sup>13</sup> and Nan Lin<sup>14</sup> became perhaps the four authors most closely connected with the concept of *social capital*. Social capital<sup>15</sup> involves the networks of social bonds, connections, relationships, expectations, obligations, and reciprocity which are crucial in linking, ordering, harmonising, and unifying people into cohesive groups, organisations, and other institutions, or integrating groups of institutions

---

<sup>10</sup> L.J. Hanifan, “The Rural School Community Center,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 67, New Possibilities in Education (September 1916), pp. 130-138, especially p. 130. See also the references to L.J. Hanifan in: Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, pp. 19-21 and 445-446, endnote 12.

<sup>11</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” pp. 241-258; see especially pp. 248-252.

<sup>12</sup> James S. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory*, pp. 300-321.

<sup>13</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, pp. 18-23.

<sup>14</sup> Nan Lin, *Social Capital: A Theory of Social Structure and Action*, esp. pp. 19, 29, 43, 190, and 211.

<sup>15</sup> Regarding the concept of *social capital*, see: Alejandro Portes, “Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology,” *Annual Review of Sociology*, Volume 24 (1998), pp. 1-24.

into even larger institutions or social structures. Social capital is found in varying degrees and under different names in societies around the world; regarding China, for example, the concept of *kuan-hsi*<sup>16</sup> springs to mind. Social capital is manifested or objectified and made socially real as groups, organisations, and institutions which depend upon social capital for their integration and cohesion. Communities, social classes, and even whole societies may be seen as institutions or *macro groups*<sup>17</sup> which rely on social capital for integration and which may include many smaller institutions. Wherever there is a society, there is social capital, under one name or another.

*Social capital* in colonial Singapore was connected with membership in groups, networks, clubs, and a variety of other types of institutions and organisations which existed both within and outside the colonial government. Moreover, the social capital which existed among Asian and European elites was essential to the interconnectedness and cohesion of Singapore's colonial elite class. This elite class was itself an social institution or *macro group* which included networks of connections integrating other institutions, as well as structures of authority and leadership which organised and mobilised the elite class in demonstrations of integration and unity, such as public pageantry and the raising of contributions for imperial defence.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, the social capital which was created, enhanced, and sustained through the interaction of the members of the elite class offered the potential for material benefits. The nature of social capital is such that it can provide economic benefits to individuals as well as to groups, as

---

<sup>16</sup> *Kuan-hsi* is also spelled *guanxi*.

<sup>17</sup> *Macro groups* are mentioned in: Dennis H. Wrong, *The Problem of Order*, p. 203.

<sup>18</sup> Regarding institutions and authority, see: C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, pp. 29-41, 44-49, and 134, and Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *Character and Social Structure*, p. 13. Regarding groups and mobilisation, see: Gordon Marshall, ed., *A Dictionary of Sociology*, pp. 266 and 426; and: Pierre Bourdieu, "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups," *Theory and Society*, Vol. 14, No. 6 (November 1985), pp. 723 and 725-727.

explained by Robert Putnam.<sup>19</sup> Asian and European businessmen cooperated in a variety of lucrative enterprises in colonial Singapore and its Malayan hinterland. The colonial social order here was a mutually-beneficial joint venture by Asian and European elites, who profited considerably in terms of economic capital, as well as social and symbolic capital.

*Symbolic Capital* presents itself under an assortment of names, including prestige, honour, status, rank, reputation, acclaim, esteem, renown, glory, fame, distinction, position, stature, prominence, standing, and recognition, as well as the concepts of *nama*<sup>20</sup> or “name” in the Malay language, *mien-tzu*<sup>21</sup> or “face” in Mandarin, and *mana*<sup>22</sup> among the peoples of various islands in the Pacific Ocean. It seems likely that similar concepts may be found in societies around the world; indeed, it would be difficult to imagine a society in which there is no sense of honour in some form. Symbolic capital may be objectified and represented by outward signs or symbols, such as titles, knighthoods, and orders of chivalry,<sup>23</sup> as well as by prestigious “branding” – for example, by prefixing the words *Raffles* and *Royal* to the names of certain institutions in colonial Singapore, thus implying elite social imprimatur, distinction, and cachet. Symbolic capital may also be materialised or manifested symbolically as tokens, marks, and other imagery, including medals, badges, emblems, certificates, commendations, regalia, uniforms, flags, statuary, trophies, iconography, monuments, ceremony, ritual, pageantry, grand public buildings and spaces, and splendid mansions.

---

<sup>19</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, pp. 319-325.

<sup>20</sup> Regarding *nama*, see: Anthony Milner, *Kerajaan*, especially pp. xvi and 104.

<sup>21</sup> On *mien-tzu* (also spelled *mianzi*), see: P. Christopher Earley, *Face, Harmony, and Social Structure: An Analysis of Organizational Behaviour across Cultures*, pp. 36-38, 42-79, and 212-213.

<sup>22</sup> Regarding *mana*, see, for example: Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, pp. 36, 61, and 73, and: Ross Bowden, “*Tapu and Mana: Ritual Authority and Political Power in Traditional Maori Society.*” *The Journal of Pacific History*, Volume XIV, Part I, 1979, pp. 50-61.

<sup>23</sup> On *objectified symbolic capital*, see: Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*, p. 50.

Pierre Bourdieu dealt with the concept of symbolic capital in various works, and he explained that social capital serves as symbolic capital.<sup>24</sup> The two forms of capital are certainly closely related. Symbolic capital provides the legitimation of the status and authority of individuals and institutions. Individuals derive prestige, honour, and status from social connections and institutions; in other words, symbolic capital requires social capital. Symbolic capital derives value and meaning from social recognition and social capital. To have social capital is to have symbolic capital as well. Rewards and sanctions involving symbolic capital can motivate the creation and preservation of social capital through social interaction. Perhaps symbolic capital may be seen as the symbolic aspect of social capital. Symbolic capital may be compared with the term *master symbol* used by Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills,<sup>25</sup> with Max Weber's concepts of *legitimacy* and *charisma*, and with the term *mana* employed by, for example, Marcel Mauss.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Universality of Social Honour, Prestige, and Face**

Symbolic capital is a key factor in the integration of groups, the legitimation of authority and institutions, and the motivation of behaviour and social interaction through rewards and sanctions in various societies – indeed, this may well be true of all societies. Around the world and throughout history, people have cherished symbolic capital, and they have cherished economic and political capital at least in part because the

---

<sup>24</sup> Regarding *symbolic capital*, see: Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (originally titled *Le sens pratique*), pp. 118-121; “The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups,” pp. 724, 731, and 733; *Practical Reason*, pp. 47-51 and 102-104; and *In Other Words*, pp. 22, 35, and 93. Regarding social capital serving as symbolic capital, see: Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” p. 257, endnote 17. See also: David Swartz, *Culture & Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*, p. 92.

<sup>25</sup> See the discussion of *master symbols*, legitimation, and motivation, in: Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *Character and Social Structure*, especially pp. 276-277 and 305.

<sup>26</sup> See the discussion of charisma and legitimacy, Bourdieu and Weber, in: David Swartz, *Culture & Power*, p. 43. Pierre Bourdieu linked charisma and *mana* with symbolic capital, in: *Practical Reason*, p. 102. Regarding charisma, see also: Max Weber, *From Max Weber*, pp. 79, 245, and 295. Regarding *mana*, see: Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, pp. 36, 61, and 73, and: Ross Bowden, “*Tapu and Mana: Ritual Authority and Political Power in Traditional Maori Society.*” *The Journal of Pacific History*, Volume XIV, Part I, 1979, pp. 50-61.



achievement of economic and political success brings symbolic capital. Likewise, the possession of social and symbolic capital provides advantages in achieving success economically and politically. Regarding the European social and political context in the sixteenth century, Niccolo Machiavelli devoted the twenty-first chapter of *The Prince* to an explanation of how monarchs should act in order to gain prestige. Successful rulers realise that their public image or prestige is not a luxury: it is essential to their success.

In the seventeenth century Thomas Hobbes noted the ceaseless competition among mankind for forms of power, which he defined as including the possession of riches, reputation, honour, command, and friendships – in other words, what we may call economic, symbolic, and social capital.<sup>27</sup> In China, the concept of *yao mien-tzũ*, the desire for gaining “face,” is part of the Chinese language.<sup>28</sup> The role of the symbolic capital of prestige or *nama* in traditional Balinese and Malay societies, as well as the concern for prestige in colonial European society, has been emphasised in the works of Clifford Geertz,<sup>29</sup> Anthony Milner,<sup>30</sup> and John Butcher<sup>31</sup> respectively. Meanwhile, Bernard Cohn<sup>32</sup> and David Cannadine<sup>33</sup> have described the function of exchanges of the symbolic capital, objectified as honours and expressions of loyalty, in vertically linking indigenous elites to an imperial monarchy within an hierarchical social order. However, conventional historical studies generally tend to gravitate towards political, economic, and strategic factors, more often than towards symbolic issues. While social and

---

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapters X, XI, XIII, and XVII, pp. 114, 123, 143, and 175.

<sup>28</sup> Regarding the concept of *yao mien-tzũ*, see: Hsien Chin Hu, “The Chinese Concepts of ‘Face’,” *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Volume 46, Number 1, Part 1 (January-March 1944), p. 58. Regarding *yao mianzi*, see: Earley, *Face, Harmony, and Social Structure*, pp. 72, 43, and 47.

<sup>29</sup> Clifford Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” pp. 436 and 447.

<sup>30</sup> Anthony Milner, *Kerajaan*, pp. 104, 105, 106, 108, 110, 113, and especially 114.

<sup>31</sup> John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya 1880-1941*, pp. 77, 121, 127-128, 170-172, 223-227.

<sup>32</sup> Bernard S. Cohn, “Representing Authority in Victorian India,” in: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, pp. 165-209.

<sup>33</sup> David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*.

symbolic capital may not be the be-all and end-all of history, these factors are certainly far too important to be left out or underestimated.

Although the social capital of relationships and the symbolic capital of prestige may be abstract and non-material or intangible in the sense that it may not be possible to take photos of them, these social commodities or resources have nevertheless been socially real and cherished by the many people who have endeavoured to acquire and conserve them; moreover, these two forms of capital can be converted into one other, or into economic capital, and vice versa.<sup>34</sup> Individuals and institutions may use social and symbolic capital to gain access to economic resources or opportunities; likewise, the possession of economic capital can help individuals and institutions to gain or sustain levels of social and symbolic capital. Thorstein Veblen explained how wealthy people could use *conspicuous consumption* and *conspicuous leisure* to convert their financial resources into reputation or prestige.<sup>35</sup> While Veblen dealt with the nineteenth-century American capitalist class, his concept of *conspicuous consumption* may be applied to non-industrial and traditional societies as well, suggesting that this concept may be universally applicable to many (if not all) societies and cultures.<sup>36</sup> Status issues are

---

<sup>34</sup> Pierre Bourdieu referred to the conversion of capital from one form to another, in, for example: "The Forms of Capital" pp. 243 and 249, and: *The Logic of Practice*, p. 119. Robert Putnam mentions the use of social capital to gain economically as well as in terms of status, in *Bowling Alone*, p. 321. L.J. Hanifan explained the various ways in which social capital can benefit a community, including material benefits, in "The Rural School Community Center."

<sup>35</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*, pp. 35-101. See also the mention of Veblen in: Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *Character and Social Structure*, p. 317.

<sup>36</sup> Regarding the apparently universal human social needs for esteem, respect, and status, see: Bernardo A. Huberman, Christoph H. Loch, and Ayse Öncüler, "Status As a Valued Resource," *Social Psychology Quarterly*, Volume 67, Number 1 (March 2004), pp. 103-114; Samuel Haig Jameson, "Principles of Social Interaction," *American Sociological Review*, Volume 10, Number 1 (February 1945), pp. 6-8; Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, p. 30; A.H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," and: Douglas Murray McGregor, "The Human Side of Enterprise," both in: Jay M. Shafritz and Albert C. Hyde, editors, *Classics of Public Administration*, pp. 135 and 219 respectively; Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*, p. 38; William J. Goode, *The Celebration of Heroes: Prestige*

clearly inherent in human social relationships and interactions.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, the concern with status is reportedly universal not only among all human cultures, but among all primates in general.<sup>38</sup>

The great importance attached to symbolic capital and conspicuous consumption in different societies, including industrialised and non-industrialised, as well as traditional and modern societies, suggests that the appreciation and pursuit of symbolic capital is essential to social reality and social order in general.<sup>39</sup> For example, Bronislaw Malinowski observed how the people of the Trobriand Islands endeavoured to increase their prestige through the traditional accumulation and display of wealth in the form of giant yams, which they exhibited in special yam houses until the yams rotted.<sup>40</sup> The *potlatch* ritual provides another famous example of the transformation of material resources into symbolic capital; as explained by Franz Boas and Marcel Mauss, members of certain American Indian tribes traditionally enhanced their prestige through ritual *potlatch* feasts, in which their own valuable goods were conspicuously distributed or destroyed.<sup>41</sup> Herbert Spencer described forms of display of distinction by elites in various societies, including tall houses in Japan and in the Aztec Empire of Mexico, as well as corpulence and long fingernails in China and in certain islands in the Pacific Ocean; Spencer also explained that individuals imitate elite fashions in order to claim

---

as a Social Control System, p. vii; and: Robert W. Fuller, *Somebodies and Nobodies: Overcoming the Abuse of Rank*, pp. xx and 46.

<sup>37</sup> Samuel Haig Jameson, "Principles of Social Interaction," *American Sociological Review*, Volume 10, Number 1 (February 1945), pp. 6-12.

<sup>38</sup> Bernardo A. Huberman, Christoph H. Loch, and Ayse Öncüler, "Status As a Valued Resource." *Social Psychology Quarterly*, Volume 67, Number 1 (March 2004), p. 105.

<sup>39</sup> See the discussion of the pursuit of symbolic capital as a theme within the work of Pierre Bourdieu, in: Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, p. 22; see also: Richard Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu*, p. 129. The concept of honour in different cultures is discussed in: Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, pp. 36 and 38.

<sup>40</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, pp. 168-169.

<sup>41</sup> Regarding the *potlatch*, see: Franz Boas, *The Social Organization and the Secret Societies of the Kwakiutl Indians*, especially pp. 342-343 and 354-355, and: Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, pp. 4-5 and 31-45.

equality with these elites, and thus to assert their own status.<sup>42</sup> The wide cultural and geographical variety of these examples points toward the social universality of the interest in and pursuit of symbolic capital in diverse forms, along with public imagery and display – a ubiquity equalling the presumed worldwide interest in economic capital. While the precise forms may vary, the basic interests in both economic and symbolic capital appear to cross cultural and ethnic boundaries, as well as the differences between traditional and modern societies.

Meanwhile, in colonial Singapore, wealthy elite businessmen converted economic capital into symbolic capital through conspicuous consumption by building ornate and sumptuous mansions on prominent hilltops in the most salubrious and fashionable of suburbs,<sup>43</sup> and by engaging in prestigious sporting and recreational activities, as well as by hosting lavish feasts for selected guests and making generous and public charitable contributions to a variety of worthy causes and institutions.<sup>44</sup> Speaking of elite suburban residences, it should be noted that conspicuous consumption may take the form of the conversion of economic capital into what Pierre Bourdieu described as the *objectified* form of *cultural capital*,<sup>45</sup> by the purchase of certain material cultural products, such as distinctive mansions.<sup>46</sup> Since wealth can be converted into prestige and status, as well as cultural goods, the pursuit of economic capital may thus actually be a pursuit of symbolic

---

<sup>42</sup> Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology*, Volume II, Part IV, Chapter X, p. 197, section 418 (tall houses), Chapter X, p. 202, section 421 (corpulence and long fingernails), and Chapter XI, pp. 205-210, sections 423-426 (fashion).

<sup>43</sup> Golden Bell, Tan Boo Liat's mansion on Mount Washington at Pender Road, and Eu Villa, Eu Tong Sen's palace at Adis Road on Mount Sophia, were two of the most prominent of these hilltop mansions. Golden Bell is still standing. See: Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*, pp. 203 and 208-209.

<sup>44</sup> See: Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, and: Maurice Freedman, "Immigrants and Associations: Chinese in Nineteenth-Century Singapore," in: Maurice Freedman, *The Study of Chinese Society: Essays by Maurice Freedman*, p. 64.

<sup>45</sup> On *objectified cultural capital*, see: Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," pp. 243 and 246-247.

<sup>46</sup> Regarding Pierre Bourdieu, objectified cultural capital, and buildings, see: Kim Dovey, "The Silent Complicity of Architecture," in: Jean Hillier and Emma Rooksby, eds., *Habitus: A Sense of Place*, p. 270. Ten Leu-Jiun kindly brought this book to my attention.

capital. As Bourdieu explained, economic, social, symbolic, and cultural forms of capital are all closely related.<sup>47</sup>

The pursuit of one form of capital may motivate the pursuit or creation of the other forms as well, and thus contribute to the formation of classes, in addition to other institutions and social bonds. Individuals who want prestige or *mien-tzu* may be motivated to seek social connections as well as to acquire wealth, since social capital confers symbolic capital while economic capital can be converted into symbolic capital through conspicuous consumption, including the consumption of objectified cultural capital. Those who desire riches may also seek prestige and connections, since symbolic and social capital can contribute to the achievement of economic success. Thus, the pursuit of economic capital as well as of symbolic capital both motivate cooperation and creation of connections, networks, and institutions.

The consideration of efforts to acquire the different forms of capital raises the question of what is the basic motivation – if any – for individuals to strive for wealth, prestige or “face,” social connections and memberships in groups, titles and political offices, and so on. Following a reading of Thomas Hobbes,<sup>48</sup> Max Weber,<sup>49</sup> and Pierre Bourdieu,<sup>50</sup> it seems reasonable to conclude that all of the efforts to pursue these rewards are basically about the pursuit of power in various forms, but especially power in the form of symbolic capital – prestige, honour, status, *mien-tzu*, or *nama*. Wealth, property, social connections, memberships, and titles are all forms of power, but more importantly, they can all contribute to, or be converted into, symbolic capital. While individuals may

---

<sup>47</sup> See: Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” pp. 243 and 252-253; and: Pierre Bourdieu quoted in Kim Dovey, “The Silent Complicity of Architecture,” p. 271.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapters X, XI, XIII, and XVII, pp. 114, 123, 143, and 175.

<sup>49</sup> Max Weber, *From Max Weber*, pp. 78 and 180.

<sup>50</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, p. 22; see also: Richard Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu*, p. 129.

employ symbolic capital to acquire or legitimate economic, social, or political capital, the overall idea seems to be to use the wealth and connections to gain or retain prestige. This would explain why some individuals hoard more money than they can ever hope to spend in their lifetimes, while others spend money lavishly – paradoxically, both activities actually involve converting wealth into prestige or symbolic capital, since individuals can gain prestige from the possession of wealth as well as from its expenditure. Individuals may feel that, the more wealthy they are, the more socially important and prominent they will be – the more they will be treated with respect and deference by others; they may gain “face” by making money, as well as by spending it conspicuously. What may seem at first glance to be a wasteful squandering of material goods – such as the conspicuous consumption of a *potlatch* ritual – could actually be a conversion or transformation of wealth into prestige and status; thus, economic capital may be exchanged for symbolic capital as well as social capital.<sup>51</sup> This would explain why Malinowski’s Trobrianders cultivated giant yams only to exhibit them until they decayed, and why the Malay rulers described by Anthony Milner pursued wealth in order to enhance their *nama*.<sup>52</sup> The common denominator of these activities is the pursuit of power, a pursuit which involves the shaping of the perception or recognition of symbolic capital within social reality.<sup>53</sup>

### **Social Reality**

*Social reality* refers here to concepts, ideas, and entities which are public and known or imagined in the minds of the individuals who make up a specific community or society. Social reality includes even those concepts which lack material or corporeal reality, but only if they are generally known by the people of a society. Social reality

---

<sup>51</sup> Regarding economic and symbolic capital, see: Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, p. 119.

<sup>52</sup> Anthony Milner, *Kerajaan*, pp. 27, 28, 105, 109, and 113.

<sup>53</sup> See: Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, pp. 22 and 93, and *Practical Reason*, pp. 47 and 102-103.

does not include ideas or information which are secret, or known to only a few people within a given social context; thus, classified documents are not socially real unless they are declassified or leaked and then made known to the public. Materially real entities are socially real only if they are known to society; if something is materially real yet concealed from view and unseen by society, then it is not socially real. Individual people are socially real only in the sense that they have public identities or personas which are perceived by society; for example, to the subjects of surveillance, successful undercover agents, spies, and moles are socially real only as whatever identities they have assumed, as whoever they pretend to be and are perceived to be by their subjects and the social context around them. What is socially real about individuals are the images that others have of them – that is, their public personas; this term is etymologically apt in this context, since the word *persona* actually means “mask” in Latin.<sup>54</sup> The efforts by individuals to gain prestige, honour, “face,” or symbolic capital by any other name, is all about enhancing the quality of their personas, their socially real selves.<sup>55</sup> The social reality of some individuals might be no more than the deceptive public personas which they have contrived to mask, disguise, and conceal their true selves, and to present a more prestigious personal identity to others – that is, for social or public consumption.

Social reality can be shaped by concealment, as well as by display. Information, ideas, and identities are kept outside of social reality if they are ignored or overlooked by society, as well as if they are kept secret. Buried treasure is materially real, but it is not socially real unless it becomes publicly known within a given social context, and even

---

<sup>54</sup> Regarding *persona*, see: Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *Character and Social Structure*, p. 14. Compare with the discussion of *personality* in: Randall Collins, “Interaction Ritual Chains, Power and Property: The Micro-Macro Connection as an Empirically Based Theoretical Problem,” in: Jeffrey C. Alexander et al., eds., *The Micro-Macro Link*, p. 200.

<sup>55</sup> See the discussion of *persona*, *face*, and the *potlatch* in: Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, p. 38.

then it is valued as treasure only because it is a type of item or material to which that society attaches some importance. What is treasure to some may be merely trash to others. For example, if John Miksic unearths ancient Chinese ceramics that were buried in the Padang, he would appreciate the significance of the artefacts because of his expertise as an archaeologist; and if a description of his discovery were to be published in the *Straits Times*, then the artefacts could become socially real in the social context of twenty-first century Singapore.

Since the colonial-era social reality – or, at least, the social history of the multiracial elite class – was documented primarily in newspapers and directories, as well as in other colonial-era publications, these sources provide the basis of this study, rather than the colonial office files and other official documents which constitute the mainstays of traditional political and administrative historical research. Social history is about what was publicly known, rather than what was known only to select individuals in the Colonial Office. The aim of this study is to work towards an understanding of how the leaders of the various racial groups developed alliances and social structures at the elite level, rather than merely looking at what a few colonial officials were thinking about or secretly arguing about amongst themselves. By definition, confidential official files were not part of the wider social reality of their time. An reliance on such official records could actually undermine the validity of a social historical study, by skewing the perspective of the study in favour of a misleading overemphasis on the views of a few officials, and, perhaps, an overestimation of their power to initiate and shape developments in the wider social reality.



## *Concepts and Approaches*

This study of the development of the elite class is *not* a traditional political or administrative history, and it deliberately avoids the privileging of the role of colonial bureaucrats in local social history.<sup>56</sup> Instead, it emphasises the non-official elites, the Asian and European businessmen and professionals – individuals who were based in Singapore, but whose interests often extended far out into the Malayan hinterland, and beyond.<sup>57</sup> (For example, Tan Kim Ching, the Singapore-born head of the Singapore Hokkien Huay-kuan and the eldest son of Tan Tock Seng, owned rice mills in both Saigon and Siam,<sup>58</sup> and engaged in a tax-collecting venture in Selangor with his British partner, W.H. Read.<sup>59</sup> Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa was a Director of the Sungei Ujong Tin Mining Company in the 1870s.<sup>60</sup>)

These non-official or private sector Asian and European elites included merchants, bankers, landlords, lawyers, and newspaper editors, as well as the owners of plantations, steamships, and tin mines, and the shareholders of the Tanjong Pagar Dock Company,<sup>61</sup> the Straits Trading Company, and the Straits Steamship Company, the companies which developed and controlled, respectively, the extensive wharfage facilities in Keppel Harbour, the massive tin smelter on Pulau Brani, and the shipping line which delivered tin ore to the smelter. Lim Boon Keng, Looi Hoi Choon, Loke Yew, and Tan Giak Kim owned shares in the Straits Trading Company in the early twentieth century, and Loke

---

<sup>56</sup> A.C. Milner, "Colonial Records History: British Malaya," *Kajian Malaysia: Journal of Malaysian Studies*, Volume IV, No. 2 (December 1986), pp. 1-18.

<sup>57</sup> C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>58</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 92-93.

<sup>59</sup> Anthony Reid, "Merchant Imperialist: W. H. Read and the Dutch Consulate in the Straits Settlements," in Brook Barrington, editor, *Empires, Imperialism and Southeast Asia*, p. 37.

<sup>60</sup> Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, p. 28.

<sup>61</sup> For example, a list of the names of shareholders in the Tanjong Pagar Dock Company, including Chinese and Europeans, appeared in the *Straits Times* of 2 September 1876, R0016425. See also the minutes of a Tanjong Pagar Dock Company shareholders' meeting on 4 May 1881, published in the *Singapore Daily Times*, 13 May 1881, p. 2, R0010198; the minutes include a list of the names of shareholders – Armenian, Chinese, German, Indian, Parsi, Portuguese, and Scottish. See also: George Bogaars, *The Tanjong Pagar Dock Company, 1864-1905*.

Yew (the father of Dato Loke Wan Tho) was a Director of the Straits Trading Company from 1906 until his death in 1917.<sup>62</sup> When the Straits Steamship Company was established in Singapore in 1890, it had seven Directors, including one Dutchman, three Britons, and three Chinese: Tan Keong Saik, Tan Jiak Kim, and Lee Cheng Yan; in 1914, forty percent of the shares of this company were owned by sixteen Chinese shareholders, including Lee Choon Guan and Loke Yew, who owned sixteen percent and thirteen percent respectively.<sup>63</sup>

Asian and European businessmen also interacted in the insurance business. When the Straits Insurance Company held a general meeting in January 1885, this company's board of directors included two Chinese directors, along with several Europeans, while the Chairman was a German businessman. The list of the shareholders included a variety of ethnicities: Armenian, Chinese, German, Jewish, Parsi, and Scottish. The publication of a report of this meeting in the *Straits Times*, together with the lists of directors and shareholders, publicly confirmed the status of these men as prominent local businessmen.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, the minutes of a Tanjong Pagar Dock Company shareholders' meeting in 1881, which was published in the *Singapore Daily Times*, listed the names of shareholders of a variety of ethnic identities, including Armenian, Chinese, German, Indian, Parsi, Portuguese, and Scottish names.<sup>65</sup>

Social capital and symbolic capital are nonmaterial and therefore invisible, yet they are nevertheless socially real and essential to people as individuals and as members

---

<sup>62</sup> K.G. Tregonning, *Straits Tin: A Brief Account of the First Seventy-Five Years of The Straits Trading Company, Limited. 1887-1962*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>63</sup> K.G. Tregonning, *Home Port Singapore: A History of Straits Steamship Company Limited 1890-1965*, pp. 17 and 47.

<sup>64</sup> *Straits Times*, 23 January 1885, p. 3, R0016433.

<sup>65</sup> List of shareholders in the minutes of a Tanjong Pagar Dock Company shareholders' meeting on 4 May 1881, published in the *Singapore Daily Times*, 13 May 1881, p. 2, R0010198.

### *Concepts and Approaches*

of communities and other groups. We cannot take photos of social capital, such as the connections and loyalties which exist between fellow members of groups, nor can we take photos of symbolic capital, such as prestige, status, or political legitimacy. The imagery and symbols of social and symbolic capital are materially real and may be available for photography, but not the nonmaterial forms of capital themselves. We may take photos of the symbolic imagery which objectifies social and symbolic capital – for example, the ceremonial conferment of a medal or a title, the stately building where the members of an institution hold their meetings, or even a group of these members posing for a formal portrait. It is by means of such imagery and symbols that social and symbolic capital are objectified and realised – that is, these nonmaterial and invisible concepts are made publicly known and socially real through the activities and interactions of individuals and institutions.

The concepts of social reality and the different types of capital are closely interrelated and even interdependent; while the forms of capital can serve or contribute to one another and be converted into each other, each form of capital also depends for its existence upon social reality. For example, the publicity and visibility inherent in social reality creates and enhances the value of social and symbolic capital.<sup>66</sup> If an organisation is publicly recognised and honoured as a respectable and high-profile institution, then individuals will likely attach greater value and meaning to connection with or membership in that institution as a valuable form of social and symbolic capital, as well as, perhaps, a means to make connections and reputations which could bring economic rewards. Another example of the visibility and publicity of social reality is the *conspicuousness* of Thorstein Veblen's concepts of *conspicuous consumption* and

---

<sup>66</sup> On the connection between publicity and prestige, see: C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, pp. 10 and 74.

*conspicuous leisure*: this conspicuousness or visibility makes such consumption and leisure publicly known and socially real, and thus allows economic capital to be transformed into the symbolic capital of elite status, identity, and prestige. Thomas Hobbes also remarked upon the connection between honour and conspicuous wealth.<sup>67</sup>

Publicity or public knowledge on some level is crucial to the process by which economic capital is converted into symbolic capital through consumption, since symbolic capital can only exist if it is socially real, and it is the publicity of material consumption which allows it to shape social reality. Inconspicuous or hidden consumption or leisure would be less likely to be socially real, and thus would be less effective or ineffective in converting wealth into prestige. Hence, the visibility and conspicuousness, and thus the social reality, of traditional displays of distinction and elite status in different societies – the giant yams, potlatch rituals, tall houses, corpulence, and long fingernails described by Bronislaw Malinowski, Franz Boas, Marcel Mauss, and Herbert Spencer respectively. Conspicuousness and visibility allow consumption and other activities, images, and displays to be communicated to the public, and to be made known to (and recognised by) society at large. *Mien-tzu* or “face” requires public perception and recognition in the context of a given society.<sup>68</sup> The creation and enhancement of symbolic capital within a given society thus takes place within the *public life* of that society, involving communication by means of visual displays in the public eye, as well as by means of written and spoken words specifically intended to reach a wide audience.

---

<sup>67</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter X, p. 119.

<sup>68</sup> P. Christopher Earley, *Face, Harmony, and Social Structure*, pp. 44 and 57-60.

## *Concepts and Approaches*

Social reality provides the context for social, symbolic, and economic capital. The coins and banknotes which serve as money, the realisation of economic capital,<sup>69</sup> have only as much or as little value as society perceives them to have. Likewise, the value of the control of property, such as real estate, stocks, and gold, is also dependent upon social reality. Inflation may be seen as a change in the social reality of the value of money, while the value of property rises and falls due to changes in economic perceptions within societies. Changes in the social reality of the value of certain material commodities or properties can cause market values to rise and fall dramatically during speculative economic bubbles involving the boom and bust of prices of stocks or real estate, or even tulip bulbs, as in the case of the famous tulip bulb craze which gripped Holland in the 1630s. The social capital of connections and memberships, the symbolic capital of prestige and status, and the economic capital of the control of labour, money, and property, all exist within social reality, and the value of particular examples of these forms of capital depend upon how they are perceived within social contexts. When the members of a society accept the value of something, that value becomes socially real. Simply put, social reality is whatever the public thinks is real.

Social reality is a crucial in the study of the evolution of classes and other institutions and social structures over time, because social reality influences and motivates individual and institutional behaviour and interaction. Economic, social, and symbolic capital exist and involve power only because they are socially real; the forms of capital, and power itself, do not exist outside of social reality. Social reality changes with the passage of time, and is thus amenable to historical study. Documentary and material

---

<sup>69</sup> Regarding money as the realisation of economic capital, see: Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, p. 93.

directories, monuments, inscriptions, and postcards, are the artefacts or footprints of the social reality of the past, and may be used to reconstruct its chronological evolution and the roles played by individuals and institutions in the shaping of social reality during specific historical time periods. An appreciation of the importance of social reality is needed in order to explain this study's emphasis on imagery and the objectification or realisation of social and symbolic capital as socially real in the context of colonial Singaporean society, especially with regard to the formation and development of the elite class.

The term *social reality* was used by Charles Horton Cooley, the author of *Human Nature and the Social Order*, which was originally published in 1902.<sup>70</sup> According to Cooley's explanation of the concept, social reality is something which makes an impression upon our minds or imaginations, and which can therefore influence us; hence, social reality exists only in our minds, and excludes anything which fails to make an impression upon us and thus does not enter our imaginations. Therefore, social reality includes what could be described as collective public knowledge. Cooley explained that the social reality of an individual person consists only of whatever it is about that person that makes a mental impression upon others. Thus, hidden aspects of a person are not socially real, and a person who is hidden from society does not even exist socially. Cooley distinguished between individuals who are *corporeally* real – that is, actual, living people – versus those who are not corporeally real, such as deceased persons and fictional characters. He argued that such dead people and fictional characters could be *socially* real, despite their lack of corporeal reality, provided that the members of a society imagine them and hold a mental impression of them. It should be emphasised that this

---

<sup>70</sup> Charles Horton Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order*, Revised Edition 1922, pp. 95 and 119-124.

does *not* mean that people imagine that such non-corporeally “real” individuals or characters are actually alive and corporeal, or even that they were ever alive in the past; rather, a person or character can be socially real within a given social context even if the members of this society are fully aware that this person or character is dead or fictional. Cooley provided the example of Prince Hamlet, as well as Robert Louis Stevenson, who died in 1894. Applying Cooley’s explanation of the potential social reality of deceased individuals to the case of colonial Singapore, we may see that, after Sir Stamford Raffles died in 1826, elite Asians and Europeans ensured that his renowned public image and his famous name continued to exist within social reality here throughout the colonial era, by honouring, commemorating, and celebrating his memory in public ceremonies and in the bestowal of his name upon institutions and places. Public images, social memories, and collective consciousness are all socially real.

Pierre Bourdieu employed the concept of *social reality* in conjunction with the creation and objectification of social classes and other groups.<sup>71</sup> Bourdieu referred to two different understandings of classes: he explained that *real* classes are groups which are organised, unified, and mobilised, in contrast to classes which are merely theoretical and exist only on paper.<sup>72</sup> This distinction between the two definitions of the term class – the distinction between a real, organised class, versus a class-on-paper, is important here, because this study will consider the formation and development of the cosmopolitan elite

---

<sup>71</sup> Regarding the social reality of classes and groups, see: Pierre Bourdieu, “Social Space and Symbolic Power,” in: Donald McQuarrie, ed., *Readings in Contemporary Sociological Theory*, pp. 327 and 333-334; Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, Chapter 9, p. 135; and: Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, p. 53.

<sup>72</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*, p. 11; *In Other Words*, pp. 75 and 117-118; “The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups,” pp. 723, 725, and 726; and “Social Space and Symbolic Power,” pp. 332-333. Regarding real classes versus classes on paper, mobilisation, etc., see also: Richard Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu*, pp. 88 and 155; David Swartz, *Culture & Power*, pp. 45 and 150; and Elliot B. Weininger, “Foundations of Pierre Bourdieu’s Class Analysis,” in: Erik Olin Wright, ed., *Approaches to Class Analysis*.

class in colonial Singapore as an organised class, a group or community of elites. Moreover, the term *class* is not always understood to include the idea of an organised class – for example, Max Weber defined a *class* such that it is not a community.<sup>73</sup> The elite class of colonial Singapore was an organised class, a community of elites, rather than merely a category of individuals who happened to share certain characteristics.<sup>74</sup> The elite class was an ordered group with a leadership structure, a community of individuals linked together by social bonds, patterns of interactions, and networks of institutions – in other words, the members of the elite class were integrated with social capital. The story of the formation and development of this elite class is thus the story of the cooperation of its members in building and sustaining social bonds and organisation.<sup>75</sup> Bourdieu explained that certain public figures may act as the agents who bring social classes and other groups into social reality by naming them in public rituals, speaking for them in public, or acting as their spokesmen or leaders; these people can make social classes socially real, organise them, and mobilise them provided that they have sufficient authority or symbolic capital – or, in Weberian terms, if they possess sufficient charismatic legitimacy. This act of making a class socially real is an example of Geertzian political theatre.<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> Max Weber, *From Max Weber*, pp. 181 and 184-185. Weber used another term, *status group*, which might be comparable to the concept of an organised class – see: *From Max Weber*, pp. 186-187 and 300.

<sup>74</sup> On the nature of a capitalist class as an organised class, see: David Stark, “Class Struggle and the Transformation of the Labor Process: A Relational Approach,” *Theory and Society*, Vol. 9, No. 1, (January 1980), p. 95.

<sup>75</sup> For an explanation of class formation, see: Erik Olin Wright, *Class Counts: Comparative Studies in Class Analysis*, pp. 379-380, 403-404, and 413.

<sup>76</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*, especially pp. 13, 102, 104, 120, 131, and 136.



### **The Public Theatre of Prestige**

Elite status exists – and is created – within a public theatre of prestige. Public prestige is the *sine qua non* of elite status and identity; indeed, prestige or symbolic capital cannot exist outside of public knowledge.<sup>77</sup> Publicity makes prestige socially real; prestige and status require demonstration in order to have meaning. There is no such thing as *anonymous* prestige, any more than there are anonymous elites. Publicity creates and sustains prestige, reputation, and all other forms of symbolic capital – and, therefore, publicity also creates and sustains elite status.

A study of the social history of elites must focus on the theatre of prestige, the ways in which elite status was made known to the public, and how prestigious reputations were sustained, enhanced, and reaffirmed over time. There is no better source for documentation on the history of this theatre of prestige in colonial Singapore than the press. Fortunately, archival collections of Singapore newspapers reach back in time as far as 1827.

An emphasis of the idea of social reality is vital in approaching the social history of elites in colonial Singapore, because an appreciation of social reality clarifies the critical importance of the types of information and communication which were public and visible, and thus readily available for perception by this society, and especially to the elites as they created and sustained their class. It bears keeping in mind that the words *private* and even *exclusive* can be used to describe prestigious imagery and social activities which were actually publicly known and, hence, socially real; for example, in colonial Singapore, the private homes of elites were often highly conspicuous hilltop mansions, while the private weddings and dinner parties of elites, as well as the activities

---

<sup>77</sup> See: Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, p. 135.

of their private clubs (including the Freemasons), were reported in the press. The social reality of colonial Singapore – or any other society or time period, for that matter – must be approached in the context of the *public life* of the place.

Interests in social, symbolic, and economic capital were integral to the formation and social reality of the elite class in colonial Singapore. Asian and European colonial elites created their elite class and made it explicit, visible, conspicuous, objectified, and socially real through public display in a variety of forms of imagery, including spectacular pageantry, monuments, royal progresses, and governmental and elite residential building styles, as well as through narratives or statements, such as inscriptions and speeches, as well as reports published in English-language and Chinese-language newspapers. Each of these forms of imagery involved a great deal of social and symbolic capital, as well as economic capital. Since social reality, social capital, and symbolic capital are interrelated and interdependent concepts, the social and symbolic capital of the elites of colonial Singapore – and, indeed, their class itself as a social entity – could only exist because these elites made their connections and prestige socially real and, thus, public. This reality and the types of capital were two sides of the same coin, since the members of the elite class shaped social reality and created their class through their cooperation in the context of institutions and public imagery for which social and symbolic capital were essential.

### **Social History in Contrast to Political History**

This social historical approach to the process of class development among elites in colonial Singapore differs significantly from a conventional political historical approach to the activities of elites. A political history might deal with elites in terms of

investigating the actions and decision-making of leaders or politicians over time.<sup>78</sup> Such a political history might be deeply concerned with explaining what certain political elites were thinking at different points in time, or what secret communications they made with one another. Political historians may focus on the alliances or secret deals that political elites made with one another, and how and why they made certain crucial decisions. Political history might also deal with discovering the difference, if any, between what past leaders said in public, versus what they were “really” thinking at the time, as well as what they said or wrote privately. The concern with revealing and explaining what “really” happened regarding the decisions and activities of political leaders calls to mind the time-honoured approaches to political history taken in the works of Leopold von Ranke and Niccolo Machiavelli.

By contrast with the focus of conventional political history on the narrative of the activities of individual leaders and decision-makers, this social historical approach toward past elites is instead concerned with the big picture of how Asian and European elites developed and sustained the networks of social bonds, groups, and institutions which constituted the social order of their elite class.<sup>79</sup> This approach is more concerned with elites in terms of their groups or institutions, rather than elites as individuals.<sup>80</sup> When individual elites are mentioned in this study, they are mentioned more as examples to illustrate the bigger picture of institutions or the elite class as a whole, and the processes, trends, and patterns which took place over time.<sup>81</sup> While a political historian

---

<sup>78</sup> Regarding social history versus political history, see: Theda Skocpol, “Social History and Historical Sociology: Contrasts and Complementarities,” *Social Science History*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Spring 1987), p. 19.

<sup>79</sup> On the emphasis of social history upon classes and social groups, see, for example: J.H. Hexter, “A New Framework for Social History,” *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (December 1955), p. 415.

<sup>80</sup> On the concern of social historians for organisations, see: Theda Skocpol, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>81</sup> Peter N. Stearns, “Introduction: Social History and Its Evolution,” in: Stearns, *Expanding the Past: A Reader in Social History*, pp. 5 and 8.

might be particularly concerned with uncovering the secret truth of what certain individual leaders were “really” thinking at the time when they made certain public statements or decisions, this study of the social history of elites is concerned instead with examining and explaining the visible, public, and conspicuous aspects of the social order, including pageantry, imagery, and manifestations of symbolic capital, since these visible phenomena functioned to create and sustain social capital by making it *socially real*. The secret writings and private communications of key decision-makers may be crucial to conventional political history, but such hidden machinations are not necessarily vital to social history, and may even distract from the bigger social picture and longer durations in time upon which social history may focus. Just as what is important to political history is not necessarily important to social history, so too social history may deal with imagery and symbolic matters which are less likely to be found in conventional politically-oriented historical narratives.

This study’s concern with social reality demands that, rather than concentrating on uncovering what was hidden by elites in the past, the emphasis will instead be upon what was out in the open and in plain view for everyone to see at the time, and, thus, part of the public life of colonial Singapore. As members of institutions and of an elite class, Asian and European elites devoted considerable attention and effort to making certain concepts publicly known, whether to the general public at large or, especially, to the more select public of the members of the elite class itself. Public knowledge is clearly essential to social reality. As Clifford Geertz has pointed out, *meaning is public*, as is culture.<sup>82</sup> The elites of colonial Singapore cooperated in making ideas known and

---

<sup>82</sup> Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in: Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p. 12.

explicit to fellow elites and to the general public, to create and sustain a sense of social reality which benefited these elites, both as individuals and collectively as a class.

In so far as this study is concerned with the ceremonial political theatre, ritualised pageantry, public imagery and display of the social order of colonial Singapore, it is focused on the performances of Asian and European elites at centre stage, so to speak, to be seen and perceived by the public audience or, at least, by a select audience of elites, rather than focusing on the backstage machinations of political stage-directors who deliberately concealed their activities from public view. While conventional political history may focus on uncovering truths which were hidden, this study aims to explain truths which elites displayed and made visible and conspicuous and, therefore, socially real. In order for concepts to be socially real, they must of course be public, not secret; therefore, since the social history of elites is concerned with social reality, it is necessarily concerned with the public realm. Of course, this is not to disparage conventional political history, or to compare it negatively with social history; both forms of historical inquiry have their strengths, but the point is that they set out to answer different types of questions. If a political historian wants to find out why a certain statesman of the past was appointed as a cabinet minister, then a close study of classified documents and private papers will probably be indispensable. However, the appointment of cabinet ministers is not necessarily important to social historians, who may be much more interested in the formation and development of classes and other institutions, and the interactions of groups over a longer period of time.

To answer questions about how the social bonds of an organised and cosmopolitan elite class were formed and sustained in colonial Singapore, this study will

consider public knowledge and social reality as reported and recorded in, for example, the Chinese-language and English-language newspapers of colonial Singapore, which provide valuable sources of information on the public life of this place – that is, on what was publicly known and visible at particular points in time. Indeed, there are no better sources of information on the public life and social reality of colonial Singapore than are to be found in these Chinese-language and English-language newspaper. A study of social reality and public life in colonial Singapore will shed light on how Asian and European elites built and developed the networks of social connections and institutions which ordered and preserved their class as a cohesive social entity over time. The concern of this study with the social capital of elite social bonds and institutions, and, hence, with the visible social reality of symbolic capital, is consistent with the concern of social history with classes, networks, organisations, and communities.<sup>83</sup> Naturally, the social historical developments and changes relating to elites, groups, institutions, and the elite class itself in colonial Singapore occurred in the context of, and were influenced by, various political, economic, and military or strategic factors. All of these factors were important, and information on them may be found in various scholarly works. Public imagery and symbolic capital deserve attention as well, as these were also factors in creating the social reality of the colonial and imperial social order and, especially, the elite class.

In order to appreciate the big picture of the social history of the elite class in colonial Singapore, it is essential to avoid getting bogged down by focusing on the

---

<sup>83</sup> On the concern of social history with classes, networks, organisations, and communities, see: Theda Skocpol, “Social History and Historical Sociology: Contrasts and Complementarities,” *Social Science History*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Spring 1987), pp. 25-26; and J.H. Hexter, “A New Framework for Social History,” *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (December 1955), p. 415.

minutiae of the day-to-day or even year-by-year activities of particular institutions or individuals; to do so would be to lose sight of the overall social “forest” by fixating on particular biographical or institutional “trees.” Therefore, this study is not a biographical or institutional history, but rather a study involving the social reality of networks of institutions composed of many individuals over time. Still, institutions and individuals can be considered as examples to illustrate of broader trends and patterns within public life and social reality.

The social historical approach entails a broad perspective of institutions and forms of authority, as well as a concern for themes or processes of historical change often involving relatively long durations of time, measured in decades or even longer periods. Besides the *official* governmental institutions and forms of authority which are often the topics of conventional political history, social history is also concerned with *unofficial* institutions and forms of authority. In colonial Singapore, the secret societies and the unofficial Chinese captains were examples of unofficial institutions which exercised unofficial authority; these unofficial institutions and leaders were probably at least as important, relevant, and socially real to the Chinese masses here as were the official administrative structures and authority figures of the colonial government. It is essential to properly appreciate the importance and power of unofficial institutions and leaders, rather than overestimating or exaggerating the power of official imperial authority.<sup>84</sup> Social history is naturally concerned with unofficial forms of authority.<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>84</sup> Regarding the exaggeration of the power of official imperial authority, see: Linda Colley, “What is Imperial History Now?” In: David Cannadine, ed., *What is History Now?* pp. 141-142.

<sup>85</sup> See: Peter N. Stearns, “Introduction: Social History and Its Evolution,” pp. 8 and 11; and: Theda Skocpol, “Social History and Historical Sociology: Contrasts and Complementarities.” *Social Science History*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Spring 1987), p. 26.

## *Concepts and Approaches*

Paralleling this broad definition of institutions and authority is an equally broad perspective of motivating factors and of time frame, with social history sometimes viewed over long durations of time.<sup>86</sup> In contrast with a conventional political historical approach, which might deal with the activities of politicians not only year-by-year, but perhaps also on a month-by-month or even a day-by-day basis, a social historical approach might deal with changes measured in considerably longer periods of time over decades or generations, or perhaps even longer durations. This social historical study of elites will employ a thematic approach, dealing with particular events as examples to illustrate themes, patterns, trends, and processes, rather than a strictly chronological approach.<sup>87</sup> This approach also considers a variety of factors which motivated elites to form the social bonds and institutions of their class; these elites were motivated by their interests in symbolic resources relating to prestige, as well as by their interests in political and economic resources.<sup>88</sup>

Throughout the history of colonial Singapore, influential individuals and institutions engaged in social exchanges of symbolic goods and social resources, involving prestige, honour, status, and legitimacy. These exchanges created and sustained the social bonds underpinning the social integration of the cosmopolitan elite class, as well as the overall imperial and colonial social order. This process of exchange involved the formulation of prestigious public imagery, including public buildings, monuments, spaces, ceremonies, spectacles, pageantry, and myths. This was a cosmopolitan process, which involved the active participation over time of Asians and

---

<sup>86</sup> Regarding how social historical studies may approach time, see: Peter N. Stearns, "Introduction: Social History and Its Evolution," p. 5. See also the references to the *longue duree* in: Linda Colley, "What is Imperial History Now?" pp. 134 and 144, and in: Paul Cartledge, "What is Social History Now?" p. 24.

<sup>87</sup> Regarding trends, processes, and patterns, see: Peter N. Stearns, *op. cit.*, pp. 5 and 8.

<sup>88</sup> On considering multiple factors, see: Linda Colley, "What is Imperial History Now?" p. 144.



Europeans alike, reflecting Singapore's ethnically diverse population. The cosmopolitan nature of this process was rooted in what it meant to be a colonial port city – the colonial status of Singapore meant that Europeans administered the settlement, while Singapore's cosmopolitan population was a typical feature of such a port. Although Europeans administered colonial Singapore, the population consisted primarily of Asians, and the European administrators and capitalists depended upon Asian businessmen, professionals, and labourers for the colonial settlement's economic health, survival, and development. The colonial social order existed only through the involvement and cooperation of many Asians; without them, the tiny European minority could never have established this order. The nature of the social situation in colonial Singapore, a growing frontier settlement of immigrants governed by a European administration, required a symbiotic working relationship between members of the Asian and European communities, with benefits for Asians as well as for Europeans.<sup>89</sup> These benefits included opportunities for the achievement of economic success and social mobility through the acquisition of wealth, as well as opportunities for social advancement through the acquisition the social capital of connections and the symbolic capital of honour, status, and prestige.

The colonial social order and especially its cosmopolitan elite class were held together by reciprocal social bonds between colonial institutions and influential individuals – social bonds which were publicly manifested through the ritual exchange of

---

<sup>89</sup> Regarding the *economic* symbiosis of Chinese and Westerners in colonial Southeast Asia, G. William Skinner, "Creolized Chinese Societies in Southeast Asia," in: Anthony Reid, editor, with the assistance of Kristine Alilunas Rodgers, *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese: In Honour of Jennifer Cushman*, p. 79. On how this economic relationship operated in colonial Singapore, see: Wong Lin Ken, "The Trade of Singapore, 1819-69," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 33, Part 4, No. 192 (December 1960), p. 163, and Wong Lin Ken, "Commercial Growth before the Second World War," in: Ernest C.T. Chew and Edwin Lee, eds., *A History of Singapore*, pp. 41-65, especially pp. 60-62. Regarding the economic and symbolic benefits which Chinese elites in Singapore derived from the colonial system, see: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, p. 18.

prestige and other social resources that were supported and made socially real through public imagery. These social bonds were mutually beneficial to elite Asians and Europeans alike, and provided these elites with rewards for their continuing cooperation over time, especially the benefits of the social and symbolic capital which they valued highly, such as networks and prestige.<sup>90</sup> The history of the development of the socially integrated cosmopolitan elite class in colonial Singapore involves ideas about social order, ideas about social exchange, and ideas about public imagery and new traditions. The following pages will deal with each of these categories of ideas in turn, with explanations of how they relate to one another, the sources of ideas derived from other works, the similarities and differences between these works and the approach of the present study, and specific examples relating to the case of the history of colonial Singapore.

### **Order**

This study's concern with the history of the social integration of influential Asian and European individuals into an integrated and organised elite class within a colonial social order is an approach which has been informed by the work of various thinkers and writers from a variety of academic backgrounds, who have been concerned over the years with issues related to social and political order and to social resources, such as social bonds and cohesion, as well as to symbolic commodities, such as prestige, status, imagery, and honours. This multi-disciplinary conceptual and analytical heritage regarding the establishment, development, and conservation of social and political order deserves some discussion. It is appropriate to begin by considering the insights of the seventeenth-century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes.

---

<sup>90</sup> Regarding the economic and symbolic benefits which Chinese elites in Singapore derived from the colonial system, see: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, p. 18.

## *Concepts and Approaches*

Thomas Hobbes dealt with issues related to political order, social bonds, and motivations in his book *Leviathan*, which was originally published in 1651.<sup>91</sup> Hobbes emphasised two basic social motivations of mankind: on the one hand, the natural hunger for power in its various forms, including honour and reputation, and on the other hand, the urge to establish peace and security through cooperation, by instituting social order and organisation through the creation of *mutual covenants* or social bonds with one another. The connection between honour and power is a key point in *Leviathan*. Thomas Hobbes observed that men are constantly engaged in competition for various forms of power, and he explained that *power* includes wealth, honour, and friendships, as well as the authority to command.<sup>92</sup> It follows that an interest in acquiring honour and a willingness to compete for honour are both natural characteristics of mankind, because reputation and honour are forms of power – in other words, since men naturally crave power, and since honour is a form of power, therefore men cherish honour, prestige, and reputation. This puts the desire for gaining “face” on the part of individuals into the broader perspective of the general interest in different forms of power.

Since the continual competition for forms of power among mankind can lead to strife, Hobbes explained that individuals are motivated to establish order and escape oppression by entering into *mutual covenants* with one another.<sup>93</sup> By making these covenants, individuals consent to arrangements or systems of rules which provide order and unity by socially bonding and organising individuals into integrated groups or

---

<sup>91</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter X, pp. 114-118; Chapter XI, pp. 123-125; Chapter XIII, pp. 141-145; Chapter XVII, pp. 173-177; Chapter XVIII, pp. 183 and 185; Chapter XIX, p. 188; and Chapter XXI, pp. 204-214. See also the discussion of Hobbes and the struggle for honour, glory, and reputation, in: Dennis H. Wrong, *The Problem of Order: What Unites and Divides Society*, pp. 70-84.

<sup>92</sup> Regarding forms of power, see: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapters X and XI, pp. 114 and 123.

<sup>93</sup> On *covenants*, see: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapters XVII and XXI, pp. 176-177, 205, and 209.

institutions for their mutual benefit, such as classes, societies, and polities. Thus, mutual covenants and social bonding create a social contract. Political authority and order result from institutions created by mutual covenants and social bonds of reciprocal obligations linking together those who initiate or establish such forms of order, as well as those who accept political systems which have already been instituted by others – much as the new members of a club accept its established rules, or as individuals joining a queue thereby accept their places behind those already in the queue. The benefits of political order for individuals include material benefits and security as well as symbolic benefits, such as honours. These honours benefit monarchs as well as their subjects. While Hobbes noted that monarchs are the fountains of honour for their subjects, he also noted that honour flows from subjects towards their monarchs as well, as monarchs derive honour from the strength, wealth, and reputation of their subjects.<sup>94</sup> Although *Leviathan* was written over three and a half centuries ago, the insights in this book are certainly quite relevant to this study of the social history of the elite class in colonial Singapore, in which order, social bonds, honour, and monarchy are key concepts. The ideas of *Leviathan* are relevant to the study of class formation and the exchange of social and symbolic capital, in the context of the interests and motivations of individuals in the initiation and continuation of cooperation to secure material and symbolic rewards.

An everyday illustration of the Hobbesian interplay of competitive self-interest and the countervailing motivation to cooperate may be found in crowds of people queuing up at bus interchanges and at service counters in shops, offices, and cinemas. All of the people in the queues wish to be served or to board the bus as early as possible, yet they wait in orderly queues because they share the understanding that this is better

---

<sup>94</sup> On honours and monarchs, see: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapters XVIII and XIX, pp. 183, 185, and 188.

than a free-for-all, with everyone pushing and shoving. A queue guarantees individuals places or turns in the order of their joining in the queue, an order of precedence which the individuals mutually consider to be fair and legitimate, though each would naturally prefer to be at the head of the queue. The people standing in a queue share a tacit understanding involving the reciprocal recognition of one another's rights, or places in the queue; thus, they institute a temporary social order on a small scale for their mutual benefit.

A queue may be seen as a type of social contract or arrangement made by the consent of the individuals waiting in the queue. By recognising one another's rights in the queue, they consent to a Hobbesian *mutual covenant*, socially bonding or linking them together. An individual who joins a queue thereby acknowledges the privileged positions of the people already in the queue, and, at the same time, the individual subscribes or consents to an arrangement which will guarantee the individual's privileged position relative to certain other individuals – that is, in front of anyone who subsequently joins the queue. A queue has the characteristics of a social group or institution: defined membership, organisation, hierarchy, and social norms or rules of behaviour. The members of a queue may use social pressures or sanctions to enforce the rules or norms of their temporary group, by scolding anyone who tries to jump the queue. Moreover, the people waiting in a queue are assembled and mobilised for a common purpose: to obtain goods, services, or a seat on a bus in an orderly and efficient manner. In a similar fashion, people organise themselves into larger and more permanent groups or institutions in order to acquire and retain material rewards, as well as to gain and conserve rewards which are non-material, social, political, or symbolic in nature.

## *Concepts and Approaches*

Individuals may consent to a social order either by initiating a new arrangement or social contract among themselves, or by subscribing to an order which has already been established; in this way, the new members or citizens of the order become parties to the existing social contract, even though they did not take part in the original formulation of the contract. The history of any social order will begin with its foundation and then follow the development of this order as new members appear on the scene through immigration or birth while the previous generations pass away, and succeeding generations may amend the social contract. The mutual covenant or social contract, whether implicit or explicit, which constitutes and incorporates an organisation, a community, or a class, is a social bond not only involving the founding members who originally initiated the agreement, but also involving anyone who subsequently joins the membership of this body.

This study of the social history of the elite class in colonial Singapore will consider the nature of the Hobbesian mutual covenants which integrated and linked the Asian and European members of this class into a cohesive and cosmopolitan community of elites, as well as how these mutual covenants were initiated, sustained, developed over time. Asian and European elites in colonial Singapore shared a Hobbesian interest in honour, which may also be described as prestige, *mien-tzu*, *nama*, or symbolic capital; their efforts to acquire symbolic capital by shaping social reality created the connections or symbolic capital which instituted the cosmopolitan elite class as an organised group.

In addition to the work of Thomas Hobbes, the approach of this study towards order – or, more specifically, the social history of the development and organisation of a cosmopolitan elite class – has been informed by the ideas of a number of authors of more

### *Concepts and Approaches*

recent times, whose works deal with social order. References to the works of certain authors will appear particularly often. The works of Maurizio Peleggi, Takashi Fujitani, Eric Hobsbawm, Pierre Bourdieu, Thorstein Veblen, and Clifford Geertz will be cited with regard to the function of imagery and display related to the legitimation, prestige, and authority of elites and the social order. The works of David Cannadine, Bernard Cohn, and Anthony Milner will be referenced especially with regard to patterns of exchange of symbolic capital, such as honours and expressions of loyalty, to create, uphold, and strengthen *vertical* or hierarchical social bonds and cohesion between superiors and subordinates. Meanwhile, the works of Linda Colley, Chan Wai Kwan, C. Wright Mills, Robert Putnam, and Mark Granovetter will be cited regarding the formation of *horizontal* social bonds among members of the elite class, especially the bonds which linked together different groups of elites – Asians and Europeans, officials and *unofficials*, as businessmen and professionals were known.<sup>95</sup> Mention must be made of these and other authors and their authoritative works, and their enlightening concepts and insights, with regard to both those ideas of these authors which influence this study of colonial Singapore, as well as the ways in which this study differs significantly from the approaches taken in those works.

While Hobbes dealt with the creation of mutual covenants and the establishment of order in general terms, this study deals with the more particular case of the development of an elite class in a colonial port city. In this regard, Hong Kong is a likely candidate for comparison with Singapore, since both cities were colonial port cities of the British Empire with predominantly Chinese populations. Chan Wai Kwan has explained the development of three classes in Hong Kong – the Chinese merchant class, the British

---

<sup>95</sup> Regarding *unofficials*, see: John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, pp. 18-19, 21, 23, and 24.

merchant class, and the Chinese labouring class – in *The Making of Hong Kong Society: Three Studies of Class Formation in Early Hong Kong*. Chan Wai Kwan explains that the Chinese and British merchants of Hong Kong shared interests in prestige and status, and that these shared interests in symbolic capital helped these two groups to form social links within their groups which integrated these merchants into two cohesive collectivities with defined leadership structures; however, while social links were formed among the Chinese merchants and among the British merchants as two separate classes, these classes remained separated from one another by cultural differences.<sup>96</sup> While there are significant parallels between the process of class formation in Hong Kong described by Chan Wai Kwan and the formation of the elite class in Singapore, there is also a significant difference: whereas, according to Chan, the Chinese and Europeans elites of colonial Hong Kong were divided into two classes, the story of class formation in Singapore by contrast involves the development of social bonds which bridged the cultural divide between Asians and European elites, allowing them to form a cosmopolitan elite class.

### **Elite-Level Cooperation and Mass Compliance**

The development of the multiracial elite class in colonial Singapore took place within a context of mutually-beneficial cooperation and partnership between Asian and European elites here. The importance of alliances and cooperation to the process of empire-building was emphasised by Ronald Robinson,<sup>97</sup> and David Cannadine has

---

<sup>96</sup> Chan Wai Kwan, *The Making of Hong Kong Society: Three Studies of Class Formation in Early Hong Kong*, p. 205.

<sup>97</sup> Ronald Robinson, “Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration,” in: Roger Owen and Bob Sutcliffe, eds., *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism*, pp. 118-142.



recently carried on and extended this argument in an elegant and compelling manner.<sup>98</sup>

Asian and European elites in colonial Singapore – businessmen, professionals, and officials – benefited materially and symbolically through their cooperation, social connections, and partnerships; Asian and European elites had every reason to cooperate with one another as harmoniously as possible and build social bridges to overcome cultural divisions, while they had no reason whatsoever to engage in conflict or hostility, whether in the form of oppression or rebellion. Indeed, the nature of interactions between Asian and European elites here was a relationship which was basically symbiotic in character, in terms of both symbolic and material profits.<sup>99</sup>

While some accounts of social history may tend to focus on conflict,<sup>100</sup> this study is more concerned with what might be termed *non-conflict*, which is understood here to include both active cooperation and passive compliance. A conflict-centred account of

---

<sup>98</sup> David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*, pp. 43, 124-126, and 171.

<sup>99</sup> Regarding the *economic* symbiosis of Chinese and Westerners in colonial Southeast Asia, G. William Skinner, "Creolized Chinese Societies in Southeast Asia," in: Anthony Reid, editor, with the assistance of Kristine Alilunas Rodgers, *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese: In Honour of Jennifer Cushman*, p. 79. On how this economic relationship operated in colonial Singapore, see: Wong Lin Ken, "The Trade of Singapore, 1819-69," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 33, Part 4, No. 192 (December 1960), p. 163, and Wong Lin Ken, "Commercial Growth before the Second World War," in: Ernest C.T. Chew and Edwin Lee, eds., *A History of Singapore*, pp. 41-65, especially pp. 60-62. See the mention of how leading Chinese in colonial Singapore were rewarded with colonial honours for their help in maintaining order, in: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>100</sup> Regarding the tendency of some accounts to emphasise the theme of *conflict* in societies, see: Bronwen Douglas, "Conflict and Alliance in a Colonial Context: Case Studies in New Caledonia 1853-1870," *The Journal of Pacific History*, Volume XV, Part 1, January 1980, pp. 21 and 22; Frederick Cooper, "Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History," *The American Historical Review*, Volume 99, Number 5 (December 1994), pp. 1516-1545; G. Balandier, "The Colonial Situation: A Theoretical Approach," in: Immanuel Wallerstein, editor, *Social Change: The Colonial Situation*, pp. 34-61; Edward Shils, "The Integration of Society," in: Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*, p. 83; David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*, pp. 125-126; John M. Carroll, *Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong*, pp. 11 and 12; Jon Goss, review of *Contesting Space* by Brenda S.A. Yeoh, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 89, No. 1 (Mar. 1999), pp. 187-189; Yong Mun Cheong, "Some Thoughts on Modernization and Race Relations in the Political History of Singapore," in: Yong Mun Cheong, editor, *Asian Traditions and Modernization: Perspectives from Singapore*, p. 70; and: Lai Ah Eng, *Meanings of Multiethnicity: A Case-study of Ethnicity and Ethnic Relations in Singapore*, p. 10. See also the discussion of *conflict theory* in: Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*, *passim*.

### *Concepts and Approaches*

the social history of elites in colonial Singapore – that is, an account focussed on conflict between racial, ethnic, and subethnic groups – would be, at best, a description of one side of the coin, so to speak, or the empty half of a half-filled glass. It must be remembered that, for the glass to be half empty, it must also be half full. Any approach to the topic at hand which concentrates on conflict between Asians and Europeans is, in effect, an approach of fixating on the half of the glass that is empty. But such a conflict-oriented approach may miss the point about half of the glass being empty – that is, the aspect of history characterised by a lack cooperation or social capital – is that the other half of the glass was still full – in other words, that there was cooperation. However, the cooperation-oriented approach of this study of colonial Singapore amounts to concentrating on the full half of the glass – that is, the cooperative aspects of the colonial society which enabled it to survive and even to flourish for over a century.

Societies exist because people find ways to cooperate and get along with one another, despite their different outlooks, backgrounds, and goals. This getting along with one another, or non-conflict, may take the form of willing cooperation, or, alternatively, of compliance or submission. Any society – and, indeed, every one of the multitude of interpersonal relationships which make up a society – must be mainly about non-conflict, rather than conflict, in order to survive; the moment that a society is mainly characterised by conflict, that society will cease to exist. Populations become and remain social groups or communities only insofar as they succeed in forming and sustaining social capital or connections amongst their members. They must sustain their cohesion and integrity as groups in order for these groups to successfully resist attempts to dominate them, and it is only through such cohesion and integrity that their leaders will be able to exercise

authority. Accounts of coordinated or systematic conflict or strife between social groups or communities must necessarily accept as a given that these societies already exist prior to their rivalry; thus, intragroup non-conflict must precede intergroup conflict.<sup>101</sup>

Clearly, the foundation of groups and communities and the creation of their social capital or social bonds must precede the occurrence of any organised or coordinated conflict between these groups or communities as such. Moreover, those societies, communities, or groups which triumph in conflict and prevail over their adversaries and rivals, as well as those groups which succeed in resisting conquest or domination by other groups, are likely to be examples of groups which have succeeded in forming and reinforcing strong social bonds, rich social capital, and cohesive social structures and identities – all of which foster non-conflict. Indeed, conflict and perception of rivalry between groups may even prompt them to reinforce their social capital, or to enhance their public imagery. For example, perceptions of the imperial rivalry or strategic challenges posed by Germany and Japan to the British Empire may have encouraged or contributed to the augmentation of the public imagery of elaborate public parades and spectacular pageantry and grand official buildings in colonial Singapore; Asian and European elites played prominent roles in the presentation of this colonial public imagery, and especially in the performance of the public rituals which went along with such symbolic representations.

These efforts by elites with regard to such symbolic and public imagery provided the elite Asians and Europeans with suitable occasions and excellent opportunities to form and enhance their connections and social capital within the cosmopolitan elite class.

---

<sup>101</sup> On the paradox of cooperation as a source and cause of conflict, see: Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*, p. 28; and: Dennis H. Wrong, *The Problem of Order: What Unites and Divides Society*, p. 209.

### *Concepts and Approaches*

The approach of this study of class formation and development is an approach which is focused on the building and sustaining of relationships and social capital through cooperation, since these are the factors and processes which make it possible for classes, communities, and other groups to exist – rather than focussing on contention. This study sets out to study the processes and developments of social history that involved the creation and building-up of social structures and order through cooperation, rather than trying to find and highlight contentious struggles and conflicts devoted to repression, rebellion, or destruction.

The story of the development and survival of societies in the past and present is more than just a history of conflict and struggle, coercion and repression, subordination and domination, hegemony and resistance. Social history is at least as much about the other side of the coin, the *ying* to the *yang* of the tired story of conflict and domination. An approach to a sense of the nature of social history should include an account of the Hobbesian process of individuals and groups cooperating to form mutually-beneficial social bonds, partnerships, and patterns of relationships, order, social cohesion, and harmony – in short, social capital. This process was fundamentally creative in nature, rather than being centred on domination and repression. To attempt to tell a part of this side of the story of the social history of colonial Singapore is certainly *not* to glorify or romanticise colonialism or imperialism; but, neither is it to give in to a knee-jerk reaction of excessively demonising the colonial order. This approach is, rather, intended to be one characterised by balance and neutrality. Of course, there *was* inequality of wealth and power under colonialism – but there is inequality to be found in *all* societies and political

systems, including in post-colonial and nationalist contexts, no matter how legitimate and democratic they claim to be.

Inequality appears to be part of the universal nature of societies. There are always some people in every society who are richer and more well-connected than others. Some important lessons that humanity has hopefully learned in the twentieth century, are that absolute equality or social levelling is a completely unrealistic and utopian goal, Marxism is an excuse for tyranny, and that regimes which claim to offer a utopia will probably turn out like the ongoing humanitarian tragedy which is North Korea. For better or worse, it would seem that inequalities of wealth and status are simply a fact of social, economic, and political life, and part and parcel of the world we live in. But, inequality need not necessarily be repressive or tyrannical. While the colonial system in Singapore and its Malayan hinterland exhibited inequalities in terms of wealth and status, it was also a system which served the interests of many people, including Asians as well as Europeans. Moreover, it was a system which provided some Asians at least with opportunities to gain enormous amounts of wealth and prestige, while many other Asians enjoyed more modest yet still considerable economic and social success within the colonial order. It was a system with a great degree of openness or flexibility, which offered Asians opportunities for social mobility and for becoming the heroes of their own rags-to-riches stories of gaining wealth and status through hard work and perseverance.<sup>102</sup> Without a consideration of this symbiotic and cooperative working relationship or mutually-

---

<sup>102</sup> Regarding rags-to-riches stories, see, for example, the references to the following self-made men in Sir Ong Siang Song's book *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*: Tan Tock Seng on p. 66, Foo Teng Quee on p. 96, Khoo Cheng Tiong on pp. 100-101, Gan Eng Seng on p. 273, Wong Ah Shak on p. 288, Teo Hoo Lye on p. 350, Ng Sing Phang on p. 424, and Loke Yew on p. 540. See also: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power*, p. 7.

beneficial partnership between Asians and Europeans, the account of the social history of colonial Singapore cannot be complete.

At the mention of the colonial elite class, it might be easy and natural for some readers to automatically assume that the concept of the *colonial elite* applied to Singapore refers only to European colonial officials and leaders of the commercial establishment. In fact, the elite class of colonial Singapore was a cosmopolitan or multiracial and multiethnic elite class. Chinese and other Asian elites held a great deal of economic capital, as well as other forms of influence. Asian elites in colonial Singapore were not merely subordinates to the Europeans; rather, the Asian elites were full partners with the European elites, in an alliance which was mutually beneficial to both Asian and European elites alike. The colonial establishment of Singapore as a socio-economic and political order may be envisioned as an alliance or joint venture of Asian and European elites which brought them substantial rewards in terms of economic, social, and symbolic capital. To have a clear picture of the social structure of colonial Singapore, it is essential to realise that this structure was one that had at its apex a cosmopolitan elite class, composed of both Asians and Europeans.

It is equally important to not buy into any notion or myth that European colonial authorities were all-powerful, or that they had total control over the colonial society and all knowledge of it, etc. Such an idea would be, in fact, totally incompatible with historical evidence. Considering the amount of economic power and social influence – as well as mainly *unofficial* political power – held by Chinese and other Asian elites in colonial Singapore, it may well be the case that these Asian elites actually held *most* of the power here, though it might not be too surprising to discover that European colonial

accounts tended to accentuate European colonial power. Of course, measuring precisely such relative amounts of power is most probably impossible. It is the nature of social history that most of the facts that relate to social history were never documented or recorded, and that even the designation of important events of social history can be subject to dispute. Social history necessarily involves a selective sampling of facts from the available documentary record of the past, a documentary record which clearly represents only that fraction of the social past which was recorded in written form.<sup>103</sup>

Businessmen of various races settled in Singapore, including various Asian and European nationalities, with the Chinese as the largest ethnic group. They were all interested in acquiring wealth, largely through trade – Singapore was an entrepot power and, later, as a staple port for the tin and rubber products of the Malayan peninsula. In order for these businessmen to accomplish this, certain preconditions needed to be met. The businessmen needed order – security, the free port policy, public order, a legal system, protection from piracy, and infrastructure. To attain and sustain these preconditions, they required networking and cooperation between Asians and Europeans. No ethnic or racial group could impose order single-handedly, certainly not the Europeans – there were too few of them.<sup>104</sup> The elite class of businessmen and colonial officials formed social links or bonds through the exchange of prestige, honour, status, legitimacy, and imagery, and the creation of institutions.

The approach of this study is designed to avoid the formation of any misconception about Europeans in colonial Singapore that would depict them as all-

---

<sup>103</sup> See the discussion of *historical facts* in: E.H. Carr, *What Is History?*, especially pp. 4-13. I am grateful to A/P Stephen Keck for bringing this book to my attention.

<sup>104</sup> Regarding the small population of Europeans, see: Sir Hayes Marriott, "Population of the Straits Settlements and Malay Peninsula during the last Century," *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, No. 62 (December 1912), p. 31 and the following tables.

powerful colonialists who could enact policies while allowing the Asian population little or no input in the matter. Actually, European power was constrained – for example, when there were riots between different groups of Chinese in colonial Singapore during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the colonial government seemed to lack the strength to quickly suppress these riots. Moreover, the richest individuals in colonial Singapore were Asians, not Europeans. In 1885, the *Straits Times* complained that it was difficult for wealthy Europeans to acquire country mansions in good locations in Singapore, because wealthy Chinese had already purchased all of the best estates, hills, and plantations in the countryside.<sup>105</sup> By 1928, Tan Kah Kee, a Chinese businessman based in Singapore, had succeeded in becoming the richest businessman in Malaya.<sup>106</sup> Perhaps it could be argued that the wealthy Chinese and other Asian immigrants were as much colonists as the Europeans – in fact, the Asians were clearly more successful as colonists here than the Europeans! The Europeans were a tiny minority, and so they had no choice but to work closely with influential Asians, cooperating with them and forming partnerships.

### **Points of Conflict and Limits of Colonial Authority**

The European elites in colonial Singapore were certainly *not* all-powerful and supreme in every field. In terms of wealth, the most successful people in colonial Singapore were Asian businessmen,<sup>107</sup> usually Chinese,<sup>108</sup> but also some others, such as

---

<sup>105</sup> *Straits Times*, 16 May 1885, p. 2, R0016433.

<sup>106</sup> Charles Robequain, *Malaya, Indonesia, Borneo, and the Philippines*, p. 121.

<sup>107</sup> C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*, p. 92.

<sup>108</sup> On the economic supremacy of the wealthy Chinese in Singapore, see: Minute by Governor Robert Fullerton, dated 24<sup>th</sup> August 1829, published as extract number 154 in: C.D. Cowan, editor, “Early Penang & the Rise of Singapore 1805-1832: Documents from the manuscript records of the East India Company...” in the *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. XXIII, Pt. II, March 1950, p. 192 (I am grateful to Clement Liew for kindly bringing this extract to my attention); Ashley



## Concepts and Approaches

Arabs,<sup>109</sup> Armenians,<sup>110</sup> Indians,<sup>111</sup> Jews,<sup>112</sup> and Parsis;<sup>113</sup> there was also one very wealthy Malay family<sup>114</sup> – the ruling dynasty of modern Johore – who were very prominent in Singapore society. Wealthy Asians in colonial Singapore maintained close connections and influence with the colonial authorities. European colonial power was so limited that, when certain Chinese groups decided to go to war with one another in the

---

Gibson, *The Malay Peninsula and Archipelago* (1928), p. 32; and: John H. MacCallum Scott, *Eastern Journey* (1939), p. 18.

<sup>109</sup> Regarding wealthy Arabs in colonial Singapore, see: J.E. Nathan, *The Census of British Malaya (The Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States and Protected States of Johore, Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, Trengganu and Brunei) 1921*, p. 91, paragraph 339; Ulrike Freitag, “Arab Merchants in Singapore: Attempt of a Collective Biography,” and: William R. Roff, “Murder as an Aid to Social History: The Arabs in Singapore in the Early Twentieth Century,” in: Huub de Jonge and Nico Kaptein, editors, *Transcending Borders: Arabs, Politics, Trade and Islam in Southeast Asia*, pp. 109-142 and 91-108 respectively. See also: *Straits Times* 28 December 1899, p. 2, and 30 December 1899, p. 2, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016462. See also: *Straits Times*, 10 February 1887, quoted in: Brenda Yeoh, *Contesting Space*, p. 59. In 1884, Governor Sir Frederick Weld mentioned the bungalows of wealthy Arabs in Singapore – Sir Frederick A. Weld, “The Straits Settlements and British Malaya,” A paper presented to the Royal Colonial Institute on 10 June 1884, in: Paul H. Kratoska, editor, *Honourable Intentions: Talks on the British Empire in South-East Asia delivered at the Royal Colonial Institute 1874-1928*, p. 48.

<sup>110</sup> Regarding prominent Armenian businessmen, see: Nadia H. Wright, *Respected Citizens: The History of Armenians in Singapore and Malaysia*; C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*, p. 14; and: C.M. Turnbull, *Dateline Singapore*, pp. 10-15. See the references to the Sarkies brothers, the Armenian entrepreneurs who founded Raffles Hotel in 1887, in: Ilsa Sharp, *There is Only One Raffles: The Story of a Grand Hotel*, pp. 22-28.

<sup>111</sup> Regarding wealthy Indians in Singapore, see, for example: Leslie Netto, *Passage of Indians*, and: Rajabali Jumabhoy, *Multiracial Singapore – On to the Nineties*. Regarding Moona Kadir Sultan, the Indian Cattle King of Singapore, see: René Onraet, *Singapore – A Police Background*, pp. 8-11; and: *Malaya Tribune*, 9 June 1937, p. 20, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0005945. Regarding Moona Kadir Sultan’s mansion in Katong, called the Karikal Mahal, see: Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*, pp. 55 and 118. Regarding the Chettiar community of Singapore, see: Hans-Dieter Evers and Jayarani Pavadarayan, “Religious Fervour and Economic Success: The Chettiars of Singapore,” in: K.S. Sandhu and A. Mani, editors, *Indian Communities in Southeast Asia*, pp. 847-865.

<sup>112</sup> Regarding wealthy Jewish residents of colonial Singapore, see: J.E. Nathan, *The Census of British Malaya (The Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States and Protected States of Johore, Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, Trengganu and Brunei) 1921*, p. 91, paragraph 339. Regarding Sir Manasseh Meyer, see: *Straits Times*, 3 November 1922, p. 9, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016597; Walter Makepeace, “Concerning Known Persons,” in: Walter Makepeace *et al.*, *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume Two, pp. 463-464; *British Malaya* magazine, April 1929, p. 316; *Malaya Tribune*, 1 July 1930, p. 9, R0005882; *British Malaya* magazine, August 1930, pp. 103-104; *Singapore Free Press*, 2 July 1930, p. 10, R0006210. Regarding leading Jewish residents of colonial Singapore, see also: Eze Nathan, *The History of Jews in Singapore 1830-1945*.

<sup>113</sup> Regarding prominent Parsi businessmen, see: Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago: The Land of the Orang-Utan, and the Bird of Paradise. A Narrative of Travel, with Studies of Man and Nature*, p. 32; John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India* (1865) p. 135; and: C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*, p. 52.

<sup>114</sup> See the discussion of the wealth of Sultan Ibrahim in: Eunice Thio, *British Policy in The Malay Peninsula 1880-1910 Volume I The Southern and Central States*, pp. 247-248.

streets of Singapore or in the jungles outside of town, the European officials could not stop them, at least not immediately. Some of these “riots” went on for days at a time. Clearly, the Europeans were not all-powerful; their power was limited, while certain Chinese groups evidently held the power over life and death, by initiating urban warfare. It would be a mistake to think that the European elites held all or even most of the power in colonial Singapore, or that the only (or, even, the primary) division or point of conflict in colonial Singapore society was between Europeans and Asians. The power of the Europeans was limited, while Asian elites, including wealthy Asian businessmen and powerful secret society headmen, had significant power and influence. The Europeans needed to work with wealthy or powerful Asians – as, for example, Sir Hugh Clifford noted in 1899 that Europeans depended upon Chinese capitalists and labourers to develop Singapore’s Malayan hinterland.<sup>115</sup> Meanwhile, those points of contention or conflict which did arise were not only between Europeans on the one hand and Asians on the other; there were also those massive conflicts between various groups of Chinese which the Europeans seemed unable to prevent or quickly suppress.

In addition, there were conflicts between colonial government officials on the one hand, and Singapore business interests on the other; for example, regarding the issues of Singapore’s status as a free port, piracy suppression issues, currency issues, the issue of the transfer of the Straits Settlements to the colonial office and the question of imperial intervention in Singapore’s Malayan hinterland. On these sorts of issues, Asian and European business interests were closely allied against colonial officialdom – so, rather than European versus Asian conflicts, conflicts could take the form of Asians versus

---

<sup>115</sup> Sir Hugh Clifford, “A Lesson from the Malay States,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 84, No. 505 (November 1899), p. 599.

Asians, as in the case of conflicts involving different groups of Chinese. Alternatively, conflicts could involve businessmen (including Asians and Europeans) versus officials – for example, Eunice Thio has shown how Singapore-based Asians and Europeans with economic interests in Pahang in the 1880s were opposed to the policies of Governor Weld.<sup>116</sup> It is important to avoid the mistake of over-emphasising the power of the Europeans in colonial Singapore, or underestimating the power of the Asians here, as well as over-emphasising conflicts between Asians and Europeans. In fact, Asians and Europeans shared power within the colonial order, which was characterised by partnerships, accommodation, and cooperation. Colonial Singapore was not only cosmopolitan and ethnically diverse in terms of its population; it was also cosmopolitan and diverse in terms of the distribution of power among individuals, groups, and institutions of the different racial or ethnic groups here. In these circumstances of the distribution of power among many groups and individuals, the social links or bonds that held the colonial order together, and especially the elite class, were especially important. The inclusive aspect of inter-ethnic power relations among elites in colonial Singapore needs to be emphasised. It is important to highlight the inclusive nature of the colonial order, especially with regard to elites – the ways in which Asian elites were included in the colonial order and the nature of the social links or bonds that held the colonial system together, including the social bonds involved in the creation, sharing, and exchange of elite imagery, prestige, and status.

Colonial Singapore provides an excellent example for an investigation of the cooperative nature of elite Asians and Europeans in the colonial order, and of the crucial

---

<sup>116</sup> Eunice Thio, “The Extension of British Control to Pahang,” *The Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 30, Part 1 (May 1957), pp. 61 and 65.

role which this cooperation played in the colonial order. When Raffles arrived in Singapore in 1819, he had to deal with the Temenggong who was living here – there was no alternative Temenggong here. Likewise, the success of colonial Singapore depended on Asian – and especially Chinese – businessmen who were willing to work with the Europeans. Asian elites held an enormous amount of economic power and influence, as well as knowledge of local business conditions. Since the majority of the population of colonial Singapore were not indigenous to the place, but were, rather, a population of immigrants, settlers, and sojourners from China, India, Europe, Southeast Asia, Arabia, and elsewhere, the colonial order had to be built from the ground up – it was not possible to impose a new foreign order on top of an existing indigenous order.

The relations and interactions among elite Asians and Europeans – businessmen, professional people, and officials – was characterised more by cooperation and harmony than by conflict; they were basically on the same page and working for similar goals, including material and symbolic rewards.<sup>117</sup> An understanding of the cooperative and harmonious relations between the Asian and European members of this cosmopolitan elite class is essential to understanding the nature and function of Singapore's colonial order, as well as understanding how that order was able to achieve a high degree of success and to survive from 1819 to 1959, with the exception of the years of the Japanese occupation from 1942 to 1945. Indeed, some artefacts of this colonial order have managed to survive the independence era and into the twenty-first century, such as the prestigious imagery and symbolic capital which was attached to the name of Raffles, the monarchy, and certain structures and zones of the colonial-era built environment. The

---

<sup>117</sup> Regarding the economic and symbolic benefits which Chinese elites in Singapore derived from the colonial system, see: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, p. 18.

survival of these colonial artefacts today is at least in part a testament to the cooperative and harmonious relations and social ties which existed for so many years among elite Asians and Europeans in the colonial past.

Cooperation and partnership were at least as essential to the success of empire-building projects as the use or threat of coercive force. In endeavouring to successfully establish a new imperial order in Asia, Europeans needed to rely at least as much on cooperation and partnership, especially with elite Asians, as upon imperial military, naval, and police power – a point made in 1899 by Sir Hugh Clifford,<sup>118</sup> one of the most prominent figures in the history of colonial-era Malaya, and a point with which Sir Stamford Raffles would certainly have agreed. Without the development of a cooperative partnership with Asian elites, the Europeans could never have succeeded in sustaining their imperial order in colonial Singapore and its Malayan hinterland. Mutually-beneficial cooperation between Asian and European elites was the *sine qua non* of the success of the colonial order. Meanwhile, the response of the Asian masses to the colonial system in Singapore was evidently characterised mainly by compliance.

It may seem obvious to point out that there was much more to colonialism than merely coercive force, and that the cooperation of non-European people – especially of non-Western elites – was essential to the establishment and development of colonialism.<sup>119</sup> However, this point needs to be stressed, because there may be a tendency among some accounts to place too much emphasis on the role of coercive force

---

<sup>118</sup> Sir Hugh Clifford, “A Lesson from the Malay States,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 84, No. 505 (November 1899), pp. 587-599. In this article, Sir Hugh Clifford urged the Americans in the Philippines to learn from the colonial experience of the British in Malaya.

<sup>119</sup> Indeed, John Butcher has explained that the British believed that their power in Malaya was based on their prestige as perceived by the Asian population, and thus on the degree to which the Asians respected them, rather than imperial military power; see: John Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, pp. 77, 170, and 223.

in the colonial era.<sup>120</sup> Indeed, it would seem that the amount of coercive force, including military and police power, which was available to the colonial authorities was rather limited during much of the colonial era; this fact was revealed when the colonial authorities experienced difficulties in their efforts to suppress riots in the nineteenth century;<sup>121</sup> the first riot in colonial Singapore occurred in 1823,<sup>122</sup> and there were even instances of serious rioting here as late as the 1950s.<sup>123</sup>

The occasional incidents of rioting over the years, and the problems which the colonial authorities sometimes encountered in their efforts to restore order, suggest that the importance of military and police power to the colonial system should not be overestimated; clearly, the colonial system was based on more than just coercive force. Recognition of the limitations or ineffectiveness of coercive force in the colonial era suggests the need to appreciate the significance of non-coercive elements in the development of the colonial system, especially the willing cooperation of Asian elites, including those elites who led important organisations within their own communities. The colonial system clearly depended largely on the cooperation of Asian elites.<sup>124</sup> Attention must be given to the importance of the willing participation of Asian elites in

---

<sup>120</sup> For examples of the highlighting of the role of coercive force in colonial Singapore, see: Chua Beng-Huat, "Decoding the Political in Civic Spaces: An Interpretive Essay," in: Chua Beng-Huat and Norman Edwards, editors, *Public Space: Design, Use and Management*, p. 58; Chua Beng Huat, "The Changing Shape of Civil Society in Singapore." *Commentary, Journal of The National University of Singapore Society*, Volume 11, Number 1 (1993), p. 11; and: Ananda Rajah, "Making and Managing Tradition in Singapore: The National Day Parade," in: *Our Place in Time: Exploring Heritage and Memory in Singapore*, p. 102.

<sup>121</sup> Regarding the limitations of colonial military and police power in nineteenth-century Singapore, and the difficulty experienced by the colonial authorities in suppressing riots, see: Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, pp. 32-47; John N. Miksic, "From Fieldworks to Fort Canning 1823-1866," in: Malcolm H. Murfett, John N. Miksic, Brian P. Farrell, and Chiang Ming Shun, *Between Two Oceans: A Military History of Singapore From First Settlement to Final British Withdrawal*, pp. 63 and 67.

<sup>122</sup> K.G. Tregonning, *The British in Malaya: The First Forty Years 1786-1826*, p. 157.

<sup>123</sup> C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*, pp. 242, 255, and 258.

<sup>124</sup> See: Ronald Robinson, "Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration," in: Roger Owen and Bob Sutcliffe, editors. *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism*, pp. 117-142.

building and sustaining the colonial system.<sup>125</sup> The eager cooperation of these Asian elites with their European fellow elites was motivated not by fear of coercion by force or threats of force, but rather by their own self-interest: by the perception of these Asian elites that the colonial system served their own material, social, and symbolic interests.

However, this is not to deny the crucial role played by military and naval power in empire-building; such power was essential to the creation and maintenance of empires. Certainly, military and naval power was crucial in the history of colonial Singapore, especially naval power with regard to patrolling the surrounding waters and working to reduce the threat of piracy. Still, the acceptance of this essential importance of military and naval power to the colonial establishment must not obscure the fact that the colonial authorities did not have the sort of overwhelming military power that would allow for total control of the situation based on coercive means alone, at least not until the military build-up here in the 1930s – as evinced by the difficulty experienced by the colonial authorities in suppressing the serious Chinese riots which occurred occasionally during the nineteenth century,<sup>126</sup> and the communist riot in 1927,<sup>127</sup> as well as the reliance on sailors from visiting Japanese, French, and Russian naval vessels, together with the

---

<sup>125</sup> On the importance of cooperation in the colonial system, see, for example: David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*, pp. 64, 124, and 126; John M. Carroll, *Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong*, pp. 13, 18, 21-23, and 36; Carl A. Trocki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control*, pp. 76, 77, 182, and 185. Regarding the economic interdependence and complementarity between Chinese and European business interests in colonial Singapore, see: Chiang Hai Ding, "Sino-British Mercantile Relations In Singapore's Entrepôt Trade 1870-1915," in: Jerome Ch'en and Nicholas Tarling, editors, *Studies in the Social History of China and South-East Asia: Essays in Memory of Victor Purcell*, pp. 255, 260-261, and 265; Chiang Hai Ding, *A History of Straits Settlements Foreign Trade 1870-1915*, pp. 49, 51-53, and 58; Wong Lin Ken, "Singapore: Its Growth as an Entrepot Port, 1819-1941," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Volume IX, Number 1 (March 1978), pp. 83-84; Wong Lin Ken, "Commercial Growth before the Second World War," in: Ernest C.T. Chew and Edwin Lee, editors, *A History of Singapore*, pp. 60 and 62; and: J.J. Puthuchear, *Ownership and Control in the Malayan Economy*, pp. xix, 20, 64-65, 68, 74, 93, 109-110, 127-128, and 136.

<sup>126</sup> See: Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, pp. 32-47

<sup>127</sup> René Onraet, *Singapore – A Police Background*, p. 96, and: Iskandar Mydin, "A Tragic Afternoon: The Kreta Ayer Incident," in: *Tanjong Pagar: Singapore's Cradle of Development*, pp. 99-103.

Johore Military Forces and the Singapore Volunteer Corps, to help the local authorities suppress the mutiny of Indian soldiers in Singapore in 1915.<sup>128</sup>

Although military and naval power was essential to the Empire, other sources of power were also crucial, including economic power, social links and partnerships among Asian and European elites, and the public imagery and prestige of the colonial establishment. This prestige flourished until the Japanese forces swarmed thorough Malaya and Singapore in late 1941 and early 1942,<sup>129</sup> culminating in their conquest of Singapore and their brutal occupation of the island until 1945. Yet, even in spite of this severe setback, the colonial establishment and its associated royal and imperial traditions and symbols continued to enjoy considerable prestige in Singapore even after the war, as demonstrated, for example, in the public enthusiasm displayed during the celebrations here of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953.<sup>130</sup>

In forging the cooperative relationship or partnership that underpinned the colonial establishment, Asian and European elites brought different types of influence and power to the table. Europeans brought military and naval power, as well as substantial economic power or capital, while Chinese and other Asian elites substantial economic power, as well as what might be described as *unofficial* social influence or leadership within their own ethnic communities – for example, the power or influence held by wealthy Chinese businessmen in Singapore and the other Straits Settlements of Malacca and Penang over Chinese labourers, either in the Settlements or in the Malayan

---

<sup>128</sup> Chiang Ming Shun, “The Weakest go to the Wall: From Money to Mutiny 1892-1918,” in: Murfett, Malcolm H., John N. Miksic, Brian P. Farrell, and Chiang Ming Shun. *Between Two Oceans: A Military History of Singapore From First Settlement to Final British Withdrawal*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999, pp. 131-136.

<sup>129</sup> John Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, p. 227.

<sup>130</sup> See the reports in the Chinese-language newspapers of the celebrations in Singapore of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, in: *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 28-31 May 1953, 1-3 June 1953, NUS Central Library ZR04654; *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 26-28 May 1953, 30-31 May 1953, 1-7 June 1953, ZR 05677.



hinterland.<sup>131</sup> This partnership or symbiotic relationship between Asian and European elites, based on social exchanges involving symbolic capital, prestige, imagery, and other social resources, was reinforced, developed, and enhanced over the years, and its forms tended to become more elaborate with the passage of time.

Works by Cannadine and Cohn deal with the vertical social bonds which existed between monarchs and their subjects in imperial contexts, as well as the ceremonial exchanges of prestige and legitimacy through which monarchs bestowed honours upon their elite subjects, while elite subjects honoured their monarchs with demonstrations of loyalty. Thus, monarchs and elite subjects enhanced each other's honour, prestige, and legitimacy in a process which linked monarchs and elite subjects together vertically. This process was not limited to the context of European monarchy and empire described by Cannadine and Cohn – in fact, a similar process occurred within the traditional Malay monarchies described by Anthony Milner in his book titled *Kerajaan*; therefore, the establishment of vertical social ties among elites through the exchange of honours was a practiced in the region surrounding Singapore long before Europeans arrived here. An important point in the work of Cannadine and Cohn is that the vertical social ties which they describe were not limited to particular races or nationalities, but rather were established in a racially and culturally diverse context. While the monarchy discussed by Cannadine and Cohn is a European monarchy, this monarchy was linked vertically with non-European elites, as well as with elites from Europe

---

<sup>131</sup> Regarding the control of the supply of Chinese labourers and the Chinese tin miners in Singapore's Malayan hinterland by Chinese capitalists, see: Wong Lin Ken, "Western Enterprise and the Development of the Malayan Tin Industry to 1914," in: C. D. Cowan, ed., *The Economic Development of South-East Asia: Studies in Economic History and Political Economy*, pp. 132, 138, 139, and 147. See also: Sir Hugh Clifford, "A Lesson from the Malay States," p. 592.

The receipt of honours and titles, as well as the public ceremonies, spectacles, and rituals of power which were performed in colonial Singapore from time to time, not only *vertically* linked Asian and European elites in hierarchical relationships with the imperial centre (and especially with the monarchy) as explained in *Ornamentalism*, but also *horizontally* linked and unified the members of the cosmopolitan elite into a single elite class, a group or community of elite individuals.<sup>132</sup> The Asian and European elites were alike in their shared experiences of partaking of imperial and colonial honours and titles, and of participating together in ceremonies, rituals, spectacles, and institutional gatherings which also enhanced their prestige and status. This study is at least as interested in horizontal links among the Asian and European members of the elite class as it is in their shared vertical links to the imperial centre and the monarchy.

Public assemblies and ceremonial events played a vital role in forming and sustaining the cosmopolitan elite class in colonial Singapore. Borrowing ideas from the work of Émile Durkheim on ceremonies, we may see that the social ties of unity, cohesion, and common interests between the Asian and European members of the elite class in colonial Singapore were created and experienced reaffirmation from time to time through the social practices of gathering together and participating in civic rituals.<sup>133</sup> Elite Asians and Europeans attached great importance to participating in public ceremonies, giving and receiving honours, and becoming members or officers of various institutions, such as boards, committees, clubs, and the Legislative Council; these events, symbols, and institutions *were* important since they provided these Asian and European

---

<sup>132</sup> Compare with, for example, the assertion that the purpose of the conferment of orders of chivalry in India was to *unify* colonial governors with Indian rulers, in *Ornamentalism*, pp. 88-90.

<sup>133</sup> Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, translated by Joseph Ward Swain, with an introduction by Robert Nisbet, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., first published in 1915, Second Edition 1976, pp. 387 and 427.

elites with the social capital of networks and elite class membership, and the symbolic capital of prestige, as well as helping to make their social and symbolic capital visible and, hence, socially real.

Rituals were thus crucial to elite class formation and the creation of social and symbolic capital, and are therefore a major topic of this study. Following Simon Harrison's explanation of rituals, we may see that the membership of this community of Asian and European elites was actually *defined* as its members participated in ritual events, and their social connections and relationships within the social order were made visible and public through the performance of formal gatherings and ceremonial spectacles.<sup>134</sup> These events, as well as the coverage which they enjoyed in the press, helped to objectify and make socially real the cosmopolitan elite class and the social and symbolic capital of its membership. The social history of the colonial elite class is thus focussed upon the *public life* of colonial Singapore.

Rituals can allow a group of individuals to set aside the differences among them, and to emphasise instead their solidarity and cohesiveness as a group in spite of certain divisions. The way in which elite Asians and Europeans were brought together into an elite class or community of elites through their cooperation and participation in the performance of civic rituals might be compared with the way in which the rituals of fraternal orders bring about the social bonding of their members in spite of certain differences among them, as Mary Ann Clawson has explained.<sup>135</sup> Her work shows how American men of the nineteenth century, who had different economic backgrounds or

---

<sup>134</sup> Simon Harrison, "Ritual as Intellectual Property," *Man*, New Series, Vol. 27, No. 2 (June 1992), pp. 225 and 226.

<sup>135</sup> This process of bonding through participation in rituals within fraternal orders is mentioned in: Mary Ann Clawson, "Fraternal Orders and Class Formation in the Nineteenth-Century United States," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (October 1985), p. 672.

belonged to different classes, joined fraternal orders which emphasised the shared ethnic identities of their memberships, as opposed to their differences in class and status.<sup>136</sup> Similarly, the membership of the elite class of colonial Singapore were divided by certain factors, yet united by other factors, although the situation was the reverse of that of the American fraternal orders, in which ethnicity was a unifying factor in spite of differences in class and wealth. In the case of Singapore, class and economic factors provided unity for elites, despite their ethnic variety. The members of colonial Singapore's elite class were divided by different racial, ethnic, national, and cultural identities, but they were united as a class through shared economic interests and imperial political loyalties.

The process by which Asian and European elites joined the cosmopolitan elite class by participating in ceremonies and joining institutions may be seen as similar in some sense to the ways in exclusive clubs and fraternal orders initiate their new members by means of rituals. For example, Mary Ann Clawson describes the Masonic initiation ritual in which the men who were becoming Freemasons symbolically put aside their signs of individual wealth or status by giving up their money and jewellery during the ceremony; this ritual act would suggest that Freemasons were proclaiming their unity and brotherhood as fellow Freemasons in spite of any class or economic differences which might have existed among them.<sup>137</sup> This ritual of putting aside differences and asserting a common identity might be compared with public rituals in colonial Singapore in which leading Asians and Europeans formally greeted royal visitors, or with the day when they delivered public speeches of loyalty to the empire on the occasion of the ceremonial celebration of the centenary of colonial Singapore in 1919. In these ways, Asian and

---

<sup>136</sup> See especially pp. 674, 686, and 694 of Clawson's article.

<sup>137</sup> For Clawson's discussion of the Masonic initiation ritual, see p. 690.

European elites proclaimed that they were united in their shared loyalty to the empire and to the colonial social order, as well as in their shared support for the *laissez-faire* economic principles of colonial Singapore and, especially, the free port policy.<sup>138</sup> They were united as well in their shared attachment of great value and importance to the markers of social honour, distinction, and prestige, or social capital. When Asian and European elites participated in ceremonies and institutional gatherings they proclaimed themselves to be members of an elite class which was something like an exclusive club – a club which was exclusively for people with economic or social influence, yet which was most definitely open to people of different racial and ethnic identities. Colonial Singapore’s elite class was thus exclusive and inclusive along lines which were the direct opposite of those of the nineteenth-century American fraternal orders. While published accounts describing colonial Singapore may emphasise the variety of institutions or clubs serving various racial or ethnic groups, and especially the European clubs,<sup>139</sup> this must not obscure the broader fact or social context that, while Asians and Europeans alike had their own clubs,<sup>140</sup> it was also true that members of the elites of all races here actually belonged, in a sense, to one big “club” or broader community which was socially

---

<sup>138</sup> Wang Gungwu has noted that some Chinese in Singapore were loyal to both China and Britain. See: Wang Gungwu, “The Chinese as Immigrants and Settlers: Singapore,” in: Wang Gungwu, *China and the Chinese Overseas*, p. 173. C.F. Yong has noted the dual Chinese and British loyalties of Dr. Lim Boon Keng; see: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, p. 75.

<sup>139</sup> C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*, p. 65; John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia*, p. 183; Khoo Joo Ee, *The Straits Chinese: A Cultural History*, p. 40.

<sup>140</sup> Regarding Chinese clubs in colonial Singapore which were apparently only for Chinese, or which were exclusive to members of certain sections of the Chinese population here, see: J.D. Vaughan, *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese of the Straits Settlements* (originally published in 1879, republished in 1985), pp. 3 and 102; Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years’ History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 534-535; C.F. Yong, *Tan Kah-kee: The Making of an Overseas Chinese Legend*, p. 161; Khoo Joo Ee, *The Straits Chinese: A Cultural History*, pp. 41, 116-117; and: Melanie Chew, *Leaders of Singapore*, pp. 15 and 37. For information on the institutions and clubs of the Eurasian community in colonial Singapore, see: Myrna Braga-Blake, “Eurasians in Singapore: An Overview,” pp. 17-18, and Valerie Barth, “Belonging: Eurasian Clubs and Associations,” pp. 97-107 – both of these works are in: Myrna Braga-Blake, ed., with co-researcher Ann Ebert-Oehlers, *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes*.

exclusive to a particular social class, yet fully multiracial – that is, they were members of the cosmopolitan elite class, an elite macro group<sup>141</sup> consisting of an ethnically diverse community of elites.

Indeed, continuing the comparison of the elite class with a club, an understanding of processes in social history may be facilitated by thinking about how clubs work. The development of colonial Singapore through the cooperation of Asian and European elites may be compared with the building of a clubhouse; before a number of individuals may enjoy the benefits of the facilities of a new clubhouse, they must first meet each other, become acquainted with one another, and organise themselves into a group or club with officers and a committee; then, as club members, they may cooperate to plan and build their clubhouse.<sup>142</sup> The colonial-era cosmopolitan elite class was something like a club, only on a larger scale; like a club, it featured rituals for initiation and confirmation of membership, and titles of office; and while a club may build and operate a clubhouse, the elite class evolved a social order to meet its own requirements, and brought about economic development in such a way that many members of the cosmopolitan elite class acquired great status and prestige, as well as substantial financial rewards.

Religious identities and conflicts with outsiders have served as important unifying factors for some societies, yet these factors were not so important for the formation of an elite class identity in colonial Singapore. The American elites described by C. Wright Mills were generally linked together historically by their shared Protestant religious beliefs and by their wars with other countries, including two wars with Britain: the

---

<sup>141</sup> Regarding the term *macro group*, see: Dennis H. Wrong, *The Problem of Order*, p. 203.

<sup>142</sup> For an example of the founding of a club, see the account of the establishment of what would become the Royal Singapore Yacht Club in: *Reminiscences of a Hard Case* by H.W.H.S. (H.W.H. Stevens), pp. 21-22. Senior Librarian Tim Yap Fuan kindly brought this autobiographical memoir to my attention in 2004.

American Revolutionary War or United States War of Independence (from 1775 to 1783) and the War of 1812 (from 1812 to 1814). The British themselves were similarly united socially into a unified national identity through Protestant religious beliefs shared by most Britons, and by the shared historical experience of warfare, especially wars with France, as explained by Linda Colley.<sup>143</sup> Eric Hobsbawm has noted the effectiveness of rivalries or conflicts with outsiders in promoting the bonding and unity of a society – as, for example, Hobsbawm pointed out that the contention regarding the Rhine in 1840 contributed to the development of French and German nationalism.<sup>144</sup> Benedict Anderson has discussed how nationalism can identify a certain group of outsiders as a *target*.<sup>145</sup> Thomas Hobbes noted the tendency of peoples to unite against their common foreign enemies.<sup>146</sup> It may be argued that European nationalism was the product of modern warfare.<sup>147</sup> However, the population of colonial Singapore was divided into ethnic groups which held a variety of religious faiths, and colonial Singapore did not undergo the shared experience of the horrors of war until 1941. Thus, religion and warfare cannot be viewed as the chief factors in the formation of the cosmopolitan elite class in Singapore in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Asian and European elites in colonial Singapore could not be united as a group by shared religious affiliation or by shared experience in war, any more than they could be united by shared ethnic identity, as in the case of the American fraternal orders described by Mary Ann Clawson. Events in Singapore that were inspired by wars in distant places

---

<sup>143</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, especially pp. 164 and 367-369.

<sup>144</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, p. 91; Linda Colley quoted Hobsbawm in *Britons*, p. 368. See also: Hobsbawm, “Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914,” in: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition*, p. 278.

<sup>145</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition, p. 100.

<sup>146</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter XVII, pp. 175-176.

<sup>147</sup> Charles W. Anderson *et al.*, *Issues of Political Development*, p. 59.

– such as local celebrations of imperial victory in the Boer War and contributions to the imperial effort in World War One made by elite Asian leaders in Singapore, for example – probably did play a role in strengthening links among the local elite class, but they cannot be compared with the significance of the long series of conflicts between Britain and France in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, or the rivalry between Frenchmen and Germans in the nineteenth century, in terms of their impact upon identity formation.

The nature of colonial Singapore's society was such that it could not be unified in the ways that other societies were. The nineteenth century was a time which saw the rise of nationalism and nation-states as societies were unified through shared national identities, cultures, and languages, and as governments promoted these shared factors through national educational policies, teaching standardised official national languages, and inventing national traditions.<sup>148</sup> However, in colonial Singapore, the government could not possibly have imposed a single language or cultural identity on the population any more than it could have imposed an official state religion on all the people – any attempt to have done so would not only have run counter to the prevailing *laissez-faire* policy of the colonial administration, but would also have driven away the Asian businessmen upon whom the colonial order depended for its survival and success. The development of a sense of national identity based on a shared culture as occurred in European in the nineteenth century, would have acted as a divisive force in an ethnically or culturally diverse society such as colonial Singapore.<sup>149</sup> Moreover, anything like a

---

<sup>148</sup> See: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*.

<sup>149</sup> See: Rupert Emerson, *From Empire to Nation: The Rise to Self-Assertion of Asian and African Peoples*, p. 329. For definitions of *cultural pluralism* and *nationalism*, see, for example: Charles W. Anderson, *et al.*, *Issues of Political Development*, p. 17. For discussions of social pluralism, see: J.S. Furnivall,



development national identity would have been antithetical to the very idea of the empire. In any event, colonial Singapore did not follow the examples of the emerging European nation-states and their projects of encouraging cultural unity. In Singapore, the colonial state tolerated the different religions and cultures of the population, and the schools on the island taught in the languages of the various ethnic groups or communities. The colonial-era administration in Singapore may be said to have established a tradition of cultural *neutrality*, even as elements of European culture were officially celebrated – that is, while Western culture was celebrated, Asian culture was not repressed.<sup>150</sup> The population of colonial Singapore could certainly not be unified by one religion, one language, or one cultural identity. However, the elites could be united as a class by their shared interests in economic, social, and symbolic capital, and the cohesion of the elites could provide some element of unity for the population as a whole.

This study focuses on the theme of the continuity of patterns and structures of multiracial elite cooperation in the social history of the colonial era, rather alternative ways of approaching the colonial past – for example, by concentrating on the activities of European businessmen, or Chinese businessmen, or colonial officialdom; or by focusing on conflicts between different groups, or the relationship between the colonial past and the post-colonial, nationalist era. This study delves into the colonial past to understand it better, rather than to understand the background of what happened afterwards. While colonial Singapore obviously experienced its share of social tensions and a remarkable

---

*Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India*, pp. 303-312; John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia*, p. 173; H.S. Morris, "Some Aspects of the Concept Plural Society," *Man*, New Series, Vol. 2, No. 2 (June 1967), pp. 169-184, see especially pp. 169 and 180.

<sup>150</sup> For a reference to the cultural *neutrality* of the state in Singapore, see: Charles W. Anderson *et al.*, *Issues of Political Development*, p. 18.

degree of rapid change over the years, this study explores historical themes which are, perhaps, less obvious, and certainly far less dramatic,<sup>151</sup> yet essential nevertheless to an understanding of the topic: the themes of stability rather than strife, elite-level cohesion rather than conflict, integration rather than division, and cooperation and compliance rather than struggle and resistance.<sup>152</sup> Asian and European elites got along quite well with one another,<sup>153</sup> and the masses generally complied with their authority. Although there were instances of disorder from time to time, these events were the exceptions which proved the rule; if a study of the colonial era were to concentrate too much attention on occasional outbreaks of rioting, this might conceal that fact that colonial Singapore was, if anything, remarkable for the infrequency of such outbreaks, considering the divisions within the diverse population.<sup>154</sup>

This study takes a big picture view of the development of the multiracial elite class at the centre of the society, and the elite-level cooperation that prevailed here (along with mass compliance of elite authority), year after year throughout the colonial era, rather than the exceptional incidents which deviated from the norm. This is not to romanticise or idealise the colonial era – the living and working conditions of much of the population were certainly deplorable by today’s standards – but the colonial system here carried on all the same with a high degree of continuity and stability, providing

---

<sup>151</sup> On the tendency of historians to focus on the *dramatic* and the *spectacular*, see: Michael A. Aung-Thwin, *Myth and History in the Historiography of Early Burma: Paradigms, Primary Sources, and Prejudices*, p. 92; and: Edward Shils, “The Integration of Society,” in: Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*, p. 83. Edward Shils mentioned the dramatic nature of conflict on p. 83, and the heroic element of conflict on p. 49.

<sup>152</sup> Compare with the description of collaboration in Hong Kong, in: John M. Carroll, *Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong*, p. 18.

<sup>153</sup> Regarding the economic and symbolic benefits which Chinese elites in Singapore derived from the colonial system, see: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, p. 18.

<sup>154</sup> See: Yong Mun Cheong, “Some Thoughts on Modernization and Race Relations in the Political History of Singapore,” in: Yong Mun Cheong, editor, *Asian Traditions and Modernization: Perspectives from Singapore*, p. 70. See also: John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India*, pp. 256-258.

### *Concepts and Approaches*

sufficient benefits for people to continue cooperating, and attracting people to vote with their feet by migrating here to become labourers or to go into business. Indeed, there was never a shortage of migrant labourers willing to flock to Singapore from homelands where, presumably, conditions or opportunities were quite bleak for them. The Asian and European elites continued to benefit in terms of prestige as well as material wealth decade after decade, and almost everyone else complied with their authority most of the time. The colonial system obviously worked quite well for the successful Asian and European elites. This study is concerned with how the social structure functioned – how the elites of different races developed and cultivated the connections or social capital which combined and integrated them into a cohesive class, and how they managed to cooperate closely despite their cultural differences. Their shared interest in symbolic capital and their willingness to cooperate in the enhancement of their social status transcended their cultural diversity, fostered their social capital, and sustained their multiracial community of prestige.



### **Chapter Three: A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?**

The role of cultural developments in the social integration of Asian and European elites deserves attention, especially cultural developments that lead towards the development and assertion of distinct cultural identities. There were many examples in colonial Singapore of Asians and Europeans learning about other cultures here, and developing appreciations for them. For example, many Europeans took pride in knowing how to speak the Malay language, or at least in knowing some words and phrases of this language,<sup>1</sup> while many Asians learned the English language, and a significant number of Asians attended English-language schools and were fluent in English. In publications of the time, Europeans expressed a great appreciation and respect for the remarkable enterprise and industriousness of Asian entrepreneurs and labourers, without which the economic success of Singapore and its Malayan hinterland would certainly have been impossible. Asians appreciated the benefits of Western legal customs and administrative procedures, and Asian immigrants flocked to Singapore in large numbers, thereby placing themselves within the jurisdiction of European colonial government. Many Europeans here developed a taste for Asian cuisine, while many Asians adopted Western clothing styles, sports, and other recreational activities. The everyday lifestyles of Asians and Europeans in Singapore were influenced by one another. Many Asians here adopted Western tastes in clothing styles, while many Europeans developed a taste for spicy curry dishes.

---

<sup>1</sup> Regarding different levels of knowledge of the Malay language on the part of Europeans in colonial Singapore, see: George Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, pp. 156-159; J.S.M. Rennie, *Musings of J.S.M.R. Mostly Malayan*, pp. 102 and 140-141; Charles Allen, *Tales from the South China Seas*, p. 67; Lionel Griffith-Jones, *That's My Lot*, p. 4.

### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

In this culturally plural and diverse colonial port city, the elites – both Asian and European – experienced cultural accommodation, adaptation, and acculturation, and at least some of them experienced some form of cultural assimilation. Do these cultural phenomena provide an adequate major explanation for the integration of these elites into a cohesive multiethnic elite class? Can the development of this class be attributed primarily to cultural convergence between elite Asians and Europeans, and especially to the cultural Westernisation or Anglicisation of Asian elites? Cultural convergence would presumably entail people of different cultural identities or backgrounds moving towards a single shared identity, whether through assimilation into a pre-existing cultural category (for example, Westernisation), or, perhaps, by moving towards a newly-created, shared hybrid identity, by means of a context which might be described as a melting pot.

Cultural assimilation and adaptation, together with accommodation and appreciation, were undoubtedly important factors in the social integration of Asian and European elites into a cosmopolitan elite class. These developments made it easier for these elites to interact and relate to one another. European businessmen relied on Chinese partners and compradors and their business expertise, while Asian businessmen benefited from European capital and access to Western manufactured goods, technology, and markets. The greater their mutual cultural understanding and respect, the more easily they could cooperate to realise their mutual economic and political goals, as well as their shared interest in symbolic capital. Does this mean that such cultural convergence can be viewed as having been of central importance in the integration of the multiethnic elite class? Indeed, is it possible that cultural assimilation was actually the primary factor in the integration and cohesion of the elite class?

## *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

The cosmopolitan population of colonial Singapore was characterised by rich ethnic diversity. The people of Singapore recognised this diversity at the time by identifying and categorising themselves and one another with a variety of racial or ethnic labels. The vast majority of the people were Chinese, but this ethnic category was divided into a number of dialect groups, including Hokkiens, Teochews, Cantonese, Hakkas and Hainanese; in addition, there was also a distinct category of Southeast Asian Chinese, known as the *Peranakans* – male Peranakans were known as *Babas*, and female Peranakans were known as *Nonyas*. Chinese who were born in Singapore and the other Straits Settlements of Malacca and Penang were known as the *Straits Chinese* and were British subjects.<sup>2</sup> The term *Straits Chinese* was sometimes used interchangeably with the terms *Baba* and *Nonya*,<sup>3</sup> and there is evidence that in the nineteenth century, the term *Baba* was sometimes defined broadly to describe all Chinese men who were born in the Straits.<sup>4</sup> However, another definition of *Baba* specifies that the Babas are the descendents of the Chinese migrants who settled in Malacca long before the establishment of the Settlements of Penang and Singapore.<sup>5</sup> Clearly, the Chinese of colonial Singapore were certainly not a monolithic or culturally homogenous group; instead, they were divided into a diverse variety of ethnic subdivisions.

---

<sup>2</sup> Yap Pheng Geck, *Scholar, Banker, Gentleman Soldier*, p. 99.

<sup>3</sup> See: *Straits Times*, 31 March 1897, p. 3, R0016457; Sir Ong Siang Song, “The King’s Chinese: Their Cultural Evolution From Immigrants to Citizens of a Crown Colony,” in the 1936 *Straits Times Annual*, p. 38; and: Png Poh-seng, “The Straits Chinese in Singapore: A Case of Local Identity and Socio-Cultural Accommodation,” *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Volume X, Number 1 (March 1969), pp. 95-114, see esp. pp. 96-99 regarding the terms *Baba* and *Straits Chinese*. The terms *Baba*, *Nonya*, *Peranakan*, and *Straits Chinese* have been discussed by Leo Suryadinata in “Peranakan Chinese Identities in Singapore and Malaysia: A Re-Examination,” in: *Ethnic Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia*, edited by Leo Suryadinata, pp. 69-84, and in: Khoo Joo Ee, *The Straits Chinese: A Cultural History*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>4</sup> This broad definition of the term *Baba* as including all Straits-born Chinese was provided in 1879 by J.D. Vaughan, in: *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese of the Straits Settlements*, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Png Poh-seng, “The Straits Chinese in Singapore,” p. 97; Leo Suryadinata, “Peranakan Chinese Identities,” p. 78.

## *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

In addition to the Chinese, a variety of other Asian peoples also settled in Singapore. People of South Asian origin in colonial Singapore were identified by a number of terms relating to ethnicity or religious affiliation – for example, Bengalis, Ceylonese, Hindus, Klings, Parsis, and Sikhs. Southeast Asians included not only Malays, but also Bugis, Javanese, and Siamese, to name just a few.<sup>6</sup> The linguistic variety of the local population is suggested by the fact that, in the 1930s, the languages spoken in the Havelock Road Police Court in Singapore included several Indian languages – Tamil, Telegu, Punjabi, and Hindustani – as well as the Chinese dialects of Hokkien and Cantonese.<sup>7</sup> People from other areas of Asia – including Arabs, Armenians, and Jews – also settled in Singapore, and though they were relatively few in number, some of them succeeded in achieving considerable economic success, as well as social prominence, as shown by the frequency of the appearance of their names in colonial-era newspapers and directories.

The diversity of the Singapore population reflected the cosmopolitan nature of the region around the Straits of Malacca since the distant past. People from India, China, Arabia, as well as from lands within Southeast Asia, have been visiting, and migrating to, the region of the Straits of Malacca since long before the arrival of Europeans here.<sup>8</sup> It is not surprising that, after Singapore was established as a European settlement and a free port, Asians from many lands poured into the island.

---

<sup>6</sup> John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, pp. 147-148; G.M. Reith, *Handbook to Singapore*, p. 77; Henry Norman, *The Peoples and Politics of the Far East*, pp. 37 and 39.

<sup>7</sup> This was recalled by Sjovald Cunyngnam-Brown, OBE, who was a Magistrate in Singapore at the Havelock Road Police Court in 1937 and 1938, quoted in: Charles Allen, editor, *Tales from the South China Seas*, pp. 127-128.

<sup>8</sup> Regarding early Indian influence in the neighbourhood around Singapore, see: Dato Sir Roland Braddell, *The Lights of Singapore*, pp. 153-176, and: R.B. Krishnan, *Indians in Malaya*, pp. 1-7; regarding early visits to this area by Arabs and Chinese, see: Kwa Chong Guan, "Sailing Past Singapore," in: John N. Miksic and Cheryl-Ann Low Mei Gek, general editors, *Early Singapore 1300s – 1819: Evidence in Maps, Text and Artefacts*, pp. 99-101.



### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

Emily Sadka pointed out that the British did not deliberately keep the different races apart in Malaya – instead, she explained that the British just accepted the pre-existing plural nature of the population.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the British did not purposely set out to create a divided population in Singapore; rather, they opened the settlement to everyone who wanted to migrate here, and once here, these migrants coalesced into separate communities along cultural lines. Colonial policies here which recognised the divided nature of the population – such as the division of the town into separate kampongs for different ethnic categories by Raffles, and the establishment of separate Advisory Boards and other institutions for specific communities – were responses to situations after they had developed, and reflected the ways in which the members of different Asian communities chose to identify and organise themselves. Thus, the ethnic division of the society of colonial Singapore may be described as having originated at the grassroots level, rather than being top-down.

Europe also contributed a fair amount of ethnic diversity to colonial Singapore. This Settlement was the home of a population of Eurasians with deep roots in the Straits of Malacca. Some Singaporean Eurasians bore the names of European ancestors who arrived in Malacca, Bencoolen, or Penang long before the establishment of the Settlement of Singapore.<sup>10</sup> The local Eurasian population represented a variety of ethnic origins, as reflected in their family names, which indicated their Portuguese,<sup>11</sup> Dutch, German, and British ancestry.<sup>12</sup> According to accounts left by Europeans, the Eurasians in

---

<sup>9</sup> Emily Sadka, *The Protected Malay States 1874-1895*, p. 323.

<sup>10</sup> Sir Richard Winstedt, *The Straits Settlements and the Federated and Unfederated Malay States*, p. 124; Sir George Maxwell, “The Mixed Communities of Malaya,” *British Malaya*, February 1943, p. 116.

<sup>11</sup> Regarding Portuguese Eurasians, see: Sir Robert Hamilton Bruce Lockhart, *Return to Malaya*, p. 180, and Sir Hugh Clifford, *Further India*, p. 100.

<sup>12</sup> On the different European ancestries of Singaporean Eurasians, see: Myrna Braga-Blake and Ann Ebert-Oehlers, “Where The Twain Met: Origins of Eurasian Families.” In: Braga-Blake and Ebert-Oehlers,

## *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

Singapore were identified by a particular cultural trait: they had their own distinctive way of speaking English, with an accent or intonation called *chee-chee*.<sup>13</sup> Europeans in Singapore might also speak with the local accent, if they had spent their childhoods here and had been educated in a local school, instead of being sent to Europe for schooling.<sup>14</sup>

The Europeans of Singapore represented a number of national or ethnic categories – for example, the British population here included Scots, English, Irish, and Welsh, while other prominent groups apart from Britons included the Germans, Swiss, and Dutch. In colonial Singapore, Australians and Americans of European descent were also considered to be Europeans.<sup>15</sup> It would seem that the term *European* was used as a racial term in colonial Singapore,<sup>16</sup> based on physical appearance rather than geographical origin, in much the same way that the terms *Caucasian*, *Westerner*, or *ang moh* are used here today in various social contexts.<sup>17</sup> This official definition of *European* also equated this term with white people – for example, the term was so defined in the report of the 1921 census of Malaya (including Singapore), and again in the 1931 census report.<sup>18</sup> Incidentally, the term *expatriate*, or *expat* for short, which is often used here today to describe Westerners in Singapore, was not used in Singapore before World War Two,

---

*Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes*, pp. 25-35. See also the list of Eurasian family names on pp. 169-171 of this book.

<sup>13</sup> See the firsthand descriptions of this distinctive pronunciation in: Rene Onraet, *Singapore – A Police Background*, p. 134, and: R.C.H. McKie, *This Was Singapore*, pp. 67-68. See also the mention of the *chee-chee* accent in: John Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, p. 186.

<sup>14</sup> George Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, p. 81.

<sup>15</sup> See the discussion of the use of the term *European* in Singapore by Dato Sir Roland Braddell, in his book *The Lights of Singapore*, p. 43.

<sup>16</sup> Emil Helfferich, *A Company History: Behn, Meyer & Co.*, Volume I, p. 104.

<sup>17</sup> See the discussions of the terms *European* and *ang moh*, in: N.I. Low (Low Ngiong Ing), *Recollections*, p. 117.

<sup>18</sup> J.E. Nathan, *The Census of British Malaya (The Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States and Protected States of Johore, Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, Trengganu and Brunei) 1921*, p. 70; and: C.A. Vlieland, *British Malaya ... A Report on the 1931 Census*, p. 74.

### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

according to *Straits Times* editor George Peet<sup>19</sup> – in any case, before this war many of the Chinese and other Asians living in Singapore were expats just as much as the Europeans, since they had come here from China, India, and other countries, and in many cases planned to return to their homelands someday. Meanwhile, some Europeans were actually natives of Malaya (including Singapore): in 1921, 19 percent of the European inhabitants of the Straits Settlements were born in Malaya.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, only 25 percent of the Chinese inhabitants of Singapore in 1921 were born in Singapore or other areas of Malaya.<sup>21</sup> (It was reported in 1931 that the Chinese in Malaya who were not Malayan-born – that is, most of the Chinese here – were almost all China-born.<sup>22</sup>) Only 17 percent the Indian population of Singapore in 1921 was born in Malaya.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the Chinese, Indian, and European sections of the local population were each alike in being mostly non-locally born, while each section included a significant minority of locally-born natives of Malaya. Of the total population of Singapore in 1921, only 31.2 percent was born in Malaya.<sup>24</sup> The now-familiar distinction here between Western *expats* and Asian *locals* developed after World War Two.

The different ethnic or national categories within the local European population were represented institutionally in their social and sporting clubs. While most European clubs in colonial Singapore were predominantly British, there were also special clubs for other categories of *ang mohs* – the Dutch *Hollandsche Club* in Cairnhill Road, the

---

<sup>19</sup> George Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, p. 198.

<sup>20</sup> J.E. Nathan, *The Census of British Malaya (The Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States and Protected States of Johore, Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, Trengganu and Brunei) 1921*, p. 101.

<sup>21</sup> J.E. Nathan, *The Census of British Malaya (The Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States and Protected States of Johore, Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, Trengganu and Brunei) 1921*, p. 95.

<sup>22</sup> C.A. Vlieland, *British Malaya ... A Report on the 1931 Census*, p. 70.

<sup>23</sup> J.E. Nathan, *The Census of British Malaya (The Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States and Protected States of Johore, Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, Trengganu and Brunei) 1921*, p. 97.

<sup>24</sup> J.E. Nathan, *The Census of British Malaya (The Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States and Protected States of Johore, Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, Trengganu and Brunei) 1921*, p. 94.

### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

Schweizer Schützenverein or Swiss Rifle Shooting Club at Bukit Tinggi, the German Teutonia Club in Scott's Road<sup>25</sup> (which became the Goodwood Park Hotel), and the American Association – just as there were also special Asian clubs here specifically for Chinese, Malays, Indians, Ceylonese, Eurasians, and Japanese, as well as clubs for local Catholics, Hindus, Jews, Moslems, Protestants, and Sikhs.<sup>26</sup> Clearly, Asians and Europeans alike tended to choose to associate with others with whom they shared certain cultural characteristics and identities.

The local European population – in particular the British European population of colonial Singapore – was divided not only into ethnic categories, but was also – and perhaps more importantly – divided by distinctions of occupation, as well as rank or status. These distinctions were very much in evidence even as late as the 1920s and 1930s, as recorded in the memoirs of George Peet and other firsthand accounts by Europeans who were familiar with local society then; indeed, there was a remarkable element of continuity in the divided nature of the European society. The most important occupational distinction was probably that of the *officials* of the public sector versus the *unofficials* of the private sector; the latter category included professionals and businessmen. The most senior and prominent European businessmen, who were known even among Europeans by the Malay term *tuan besar*, and who were eligible for membership in the exclusive and highly prestigious Singapore Club, formed a small but

---

<sup>25</sup> See: *The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1914*, R0011844, pp. 96, 99, and 100, regarding the Dutch, Swiss, and German clubs respectively. Regarding the Teutonia Club, see: Emil Helfferich, *A Company History: Behn, Meyer & Co.*, Volume I, p. 106, and Volume II, pp. 48-52 and 122. Regarding the Swiss Club, see: Hans Schweizer-Iten, *One Hundred Years of the Swiss Club and the Swiss Community of Singapore 1871-1971*. See also: Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, p. 152.

<sup>26</sup> The names of these clubs may be found by perusing the lists of clubs in the annual editions of the *The Singapore and Straits Directory* and other directories. Regarding the (Jewish) Myrtle Club, see: Denis Santry and Claude, *Salubrious Singapore*, p. 36. Regarding the Sikhs and the Singapore Khalsa Association, see: Tan Tai Yong, *Singapore Khalsa Association*. About clubs, see also: Lionel Griffith-Jones, *That's My Lot: An Anecdotal Autobiography of a British Ex-Singapore Colonial*, p. 45.

## *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

very important elite category within the European population.<sup>27</sup> Those Britons who did not hold the rank of *tuan besar* were known instead by such terms as *assistant*,<sup>28</sup> *junior*,<sup>29</sup> and *tuan kecil*;<sup>30</sup> they could not join the Singapore Club, but they were welcome to join other European clubs, including the Cricket Club, the Swimming Club,<sup>31</sup> and the Yacht Club.<sup>32</sup> Other special categories within the British European population here included the staff of the Singapore Harbour Board (who had their own suburb, golf course, and club<sup>33</sup>), armed services personnel<sup>34</sup> (who also had their own separate residential areas, as well as their own yacht clubs<sup>35</sup>), and the European sales staff of the three department stores – John Little’s, Robinson’s, and Whiteaway’s – who were regarded as being in the category of *tradesmen*, as distinct from (and inferior to) the European merchants prior to World War Two.<sup>36</sup>

The social division of the local European population into various cultural and social categories in the 1920s and 1930s reflected a great degree of historical continuity with the European social structure here in the earlier part of the colonial era, as may be seen in the description of the divisions within European society in Singapore in the

---

<sup>27</sup> Arnold Wright and H.A. Cartwright, eds., *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya*, p. 624; and: “Gone are the Days” by “As You Were” (an anonymous author), in *British Malaya* magazine, September 1949, p. 305. See also: Edwin A. Brown, *Indiscreet Memories*, pp. 33; Allen, *Tales from the South China Seas*, p. 58, and George Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, pp. 27, 97, 108, and 193.

<sup>28</sup> Regarding *assistants*, see: Edwin A. Brown, *Indiscreet Memories*, p. 33; and George Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, pp. 24, 53, 156 162 168.

<sup>29</sup> Regarding *juniors*, see: Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, pp. 35; 83,132; and Allen, *Tales from the South China Seas*, p. 58, 62, 64, 66.

<sup>30</sup> Regarding the term *tuan kecil*, see: Allen, *Tales from the South China Seas*, pp. 58 and 239.

<sup>31</sup> Lionel Griffith-Jones, *That’s My Lot*, p. 45; Allen, *Tales from the South China Seas*, p. 58; and Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, p. 24.

<sup>32</sup> *Straits Times*, 2 July 1919, p. 10, R0016572.

<sup>33</sup> Regarding the Harbour Board, see: Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, pp. 27, 36, 82, 100, 152, 194 and 198.

<sup>34</sup> See the *Straits Times*, 28 June 1938, p. 10, R0016758, for a letter to the editor regarding the social divide between military personnel and civilians; and see also: George Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, p. 203.

<sup>35</sup> “Singapore’s Five Yacht Clubs,” 1936 *Straits Times Annual*, p. 106.

<sup>36</sup> See: Charles Allen, ed., *Tales from the South China Seas*, p. 67; and: George Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, pp. 82 and 193.

### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

1860s, written from the first-hand perspective of an eyewitness and a participant by *Straits Times* editor John Cameron. Cameron described European society in Singapore in the 1860s as being divided between, on the one hand those Europeans who were not as *lettered* or educated as the upper class, and on the other hand, an elite of officials, businessmen, doctors, lawyers, and military men.<sup>37</sup> If anything, European society here became even more divided between from the time when Cameron described it in the 1860s, and when George Peet first observed this society in 1923. A big-picture view of the history of social history in colonial Singapore reveals a theme of the continuity of the social division of the population into cultural and sub-cultural categories, as people with similar backgrounds naturally tended to socialise with one another.

Various cultural categories of Asians and Europeans were represented among the elite class, as businessmen, professionals, or civil servants. Overall, this cosmopolitan elite class seems to have been characterised by a remarkable diversity of cultural and social divisions and identities, and this held true throughout the colonial period. Naturally, the degree to which these elites could understand, appreciate, assimilate, or accommodate each other's cultures, facilitated their ability to interact with one another despite their different cultural backgrounds, and thus their ability to cooperate to achieve their mutual economic and other goals. Specifically, Asian and European elites needed to cooperate in doing business and raising revenue, in maintaining social stability, and in sustaining and enhancing their prestige and status as elites.

So, just how important were these cultural phenomena of cultural assimilation and convergence, as factors in elite class integration and cohesion? To answer this question, the following pages will begin with a consideration of the cultural backgrounds of the

---

<sup>37</sup> John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, pp. 285 and 287.

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

migrants, with a particular concentration on two categories of migrants to colonial Singapore – namely, the Chinese and the Europeans – in view of the fact that the Chinese were the most numerous and held enormous economic power as well as unofficial social capital, while the Europeans held the most official political authority here. This consideration will provide some idea of how these categories viewed one another, or were prepared to view one another, and thus allow for some understanding of how the elites of these categories were able to relate to one another in Singapore. The focus on the Chinese and the Europeans in this section is motivated only by a concern for the brevity of this study, and is not meant to overlook or underestimate the importance of the many other ethnic categories, all of which certainly deserve scholarly attention in their own right.

Asian and European elites here influenced each other culturally in a number of areas, including business and politics, recreation and sports, language, education, food, clothing, housing, and the law. The cultural history of elites in Singapore was chronicled in local newspapers, which are the best documentary sources of information on historical developments in each of these areas in the colonial period, as well as on what was publicly known and, hence, socially real here. The local newspapers of the colonial era provided a running commentary of the cultural developments which helped smooth the way for Asian and European elites to interact and integrate as a class. Personal memoirs penned by Asians and Europeans with first-hand knowledge of colonial Singapore also detail cultural and social conditions at different points in time, and offer inside perspectives of the cosmopolitan elite class. A consideration of both newspapers and personal memoirs together is necessary in approaching the question of whether or not

cultural convergence was the main factor in bringing these Asians and Europeans together as an elite class. To answer that question, it is first necessary to have some idea of just how extensive was this cultural convergence between elites from the East and the West.

### **Business and Political Cultures**

The Asians and Europeans who settled in Singapore brought with them their own sets of values and beliefs related to economic activity and governmental regulation – in other words, their business and political cultures. Their cultural backgrounds in these areas prepared them for their interaction with one another here, and shaped the ways in which they adapted to the conditions they found on this island. Any understanding of how their business cultures developed in Singapore requires some familiarity with their cultural backgrounds in their home countries. Given the rich ethnic diversity of the immigrant population and their descendants, the following pages will focus particular attention upon the Chinese and the British who profoundly influenced the cultural development in the business and political fields, as well as so many other areas here. The following pages will focus on the business and political cultural values which were brought to colonial Singapore by Chinese and Britons, and the convergence of these two cultural streams here.<sup>38</sup>

The values and beliefs of Chinese businessmen here were shaped by the experiences of their ancestors in China – experiences which helped form the heritage of so much of the population of colonial Singapore. Imperial China was characterised by a

---

<sup>38</sup> This section was inspired by Wang Gungwu's work on the cultural values of Chinese merchants, collected in the volume *China and the Chinese Overseas*; his work has encouraged me to briefly survey the cultural values of *both* Chinese and Europeans in colonial Singapore, and to relate these values to the development of the elite class here.



*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

long tradition of bureaucratic government, in which generations of officials – who were known among Europeans as mandarins – administered the state according to the teachings of Confucianism and employed a competitive examination system to recruit new officials. The reputation and influence of this administrative element of Chinese culture spread from China to the West, where it came to be idealised and admired by European elites. Portuguese and Spanish missionaries observed the Chinese administrative system in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and brought knowledge of it to Europe. In the eighteenth century, intellectuals in France, including Voltaire, Montesquieu, Diderot, and Rousseau, praised the Chinese system in their writings. In the nineteenth century, certain British officials appreciated aspects of the Chinese administrative tradition so much that they decided to adopt elements of the Chinese civil service examination system, first in British India in 1832, and later in Britain itself in 1855.<sup>39</sup>

Unfortunately, aside from the civil service examination system so admired in the West, China's Confucian administrative tradition was also characterised by a negative attitude towards businessmen on the part of the mandarins, and this created difficulties for Chinese merchants. The mandarins, who were traditionally suspicious of merchants, imposed restrictions on Chinese traders doing business overseas, and favoured the agricultural sector over the commercial and industrial sectors. The mandarin prejudice against merchants hindered the economic development of China at a time when thriving capitalism in Europe provided Western governments with the funds and technological innovations needed to build powerful military and naval forces, which they employed to

---

<sup>39</sup> Teng Ssu-yu, "Chinese Influence on the Western Examination System," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (September 1943), pp. 267-312. See also: C. Northcote Parkinson, *Parkinson's Law*, p. 21.

fight with one another, as well as to conquer less technologically-advanced peoples and establish vast colonial empires.<sup>40</sup>

Generations of Chinese merchants persevered in spite of the challenges they faced from Chinese officialdom, and managed to develop cultural characteristics which prepared them for their establishment in foreign lands. As Wang Gungwu explains, Chinese merchants responded to the difficulties they faced from the mandarins by developing a commercial culture characterised by adaptability, flexibility, ingenuity, and courage – a set of virtues which they carried with them when they went abroad to seek their fortunes.<sup>41</sup> These qualities served them well when they began doing business in the new political environments of European colonies in Southeast Asia, where their success depended upon their ability to adapt to foreign trading partners and unfamiliar governmental policies.

Meanwhile, Europe developed a capitalist culture of its own, including a decidedly pro-business political culture. As Paul Kennedy explains, a mutually-beneficial symbiosis evolved between European governments and the market economy; the private sector supplied states with tax revenues and loans, while governments furnished pro-business laws and policies which were favourable for merchants, including foreigners.<sup>42</sup> Adam Smith famously articulated this pro-business philosophy or capitalist culture of economic liberalism in the eighteenth century.

---

<sup>40</sup> Wang Gungwu, “Merchants without Empires: the Hokkien Sojourning Communities,” and: “The Culture of Chinese Merchants,” in: Wang Gungwu, *China and the Chinese Overseas*, especially pp. 79-81, 183, 188, and 195; and: Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, p. 9.

<sup>41</sup> Wang Gungwu, “The Chinese as Immigrants and Settlers: Singapore” and “The Culture of Chinese Merchants” in: *China and the Chinese Overseas*, pp. 170, 185, 190, and 191.

<sup>42</sup> Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, p. 24. See also: Linda Colley, *Britons*, pp. 56, 60, and 71.

### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

The capitalist culture of modern Britain, including pro-business government policies combined with a willingness on the part of officials and merchants alike to cooperate economically with foreigners, manifested itself in a number of ways and in various locations. One implication of this culture was that it was possible for an immigrant capitalist to thrive in Britain. For example, Nathan Mayer Rothschild, a member of the famous Jewish banking family from Frankfurt am Main, achieved great financial success in London in the early nineteenth century. Jewish capital helped finance Britain's wars with Napoleonic France.<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, British merchants in India became accustomed to working with non-European merchants.<sup>44</sup> British merchants and officials developed a capitalist culture characterised by ethnic pluralism and cooperation, as well as pro-business political and legal systems.

Thus, when British administrators arrived in Singapore in the nineteenth century, they brought with them a heritage of a capitalist culture, characterised by free enterprise, as well as by a symbiosis between the public and private sectors, and between British and foreign capitalists. These officials were culturally well prepared to appreciate the importance of merchants here, whether these merchants were from Britain, continental Europe, or Asia. Sir Stamford Raffles exemplified this capitalist culture as it applied to officials: a pro-business official attitude, combined with a pragmatic appreciation of the importance of Chinese and other Asian merchants to British interests. After founding the Settlement of Singapore, Raffles, as the Lieutenant-Governor of Fort Marlborough at Bencoolen and its dependencies (including Singapore), established pro-business laws here which applied to Asians and Europeans alike. His port regulations specified that, as

---

<sup>43</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons*, p. 231.

<sup>44</sup> C.A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*, pp. 4-6, 10, 200-201, 204.

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

a free port, the trade of Singapore would be open and free of port duties to ships of all nations.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, he issued written instructions that British legal principles should be applied with sensitivity to the opinions of the Chinese, Malays, and others who settled in Singapore, that their rights to property and equality before the law should be protected, and that respect should be given to their religious beliefs, their marriage and inheritance customs, and their ability to express their views to the government.<sup>46</sup>

Naturally, the Western business culture belonged as much to British merchants, as it did to British officials such as Raffles who formulated the policies which affected business here. The British merchants who made their way here brought with them their own component of the prevailing capitalist culture – specifically, a business culture which appreciated the value of working with non-British merchants, in an interdependent and mutually-beneficial economic partnership or symbiosis between Asians and Europeans. This is reflected in the membership of the Singapore Chamber of Commerce in the middle of the nineteenth century. In 1846, the Arab, Chinese, German, Jewish, Parsi, and Portuguese ethnicities were represented among the members of the Chamber, as well as a number of Britons or Scots who were prominent in early Singapore, such as Alexander Guthrie, George Garden Nicol, and W.H. Read.<sup>47</sup>

From time to time, Asian and European businessmen publicly expressed their wholehearted support for the government's pro-business policy – specifically, the freedom of the port. For example, an address presented to Sir Stamford Raffles by the local Asian and European merchants in 1823 credited the development of the Settlement

---

<sup>45</sup> Sir Stamford Raffles, "Regulation, No. II. of 1823. A Regulation for the Port of Singapore." In: Sophia, Lady Raffles, *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles*, Appendix, p. 41.

<sup>46</sup> "Minute by the Lieutenant Governor." In: Lady Raffles, *Memoir*, Appendix, pp. 66-67 and 70-71.

<sup>47</sup> *The Straits Times Almanack, Calendar and Directory, For The year 1846*, p. 47, R0011768.

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

of Singapore in the first four years of its existence to the liberal principles of his administration – these liberal principles presumably included especially the free port policy, which Raffles emphasised in his reply to the address.<sup>48</sup> When Lord Dalhousie visited Singapore in 1850, the leading Chinese merchants presented an address to him in which they expressed their appreciation of the policy of free trade, while another address signed by local Muslims – including Arabs, Indians, and Malays – expressed gratitude for the government’s policy of respecting their customs and religion.<sup>49</sup> This policy which may be seen as another aspect of the liberal principles mentioned in the address to Raffles in 1823; certainly, the government’s respect for different religions and cultures facilitated the establishment of Singapore as a place where merchants from many lands could do business to their mutual advantage – a development which would have likely been impossible had the government attempted to impose Europe culture and religion upon the Asian population.

Important public occasions – such as the visits of royalty and other important personages, and celebrations of royal holidays – provided leading Chinese and other Asian businessmen, as well as European merchants, with ritualised opportunities to present public addresses, and the texts of these addresses were subsequently published in the press. With these addresses, the Asian and European merchants reminded the colonial government of its end of the bargain, so to speak, in the economic and political symbiosis between Asians and Europeans, and officials and unofficials, in Singapore – this symbiosis depended upon Chinese and other Asian merchants doing business with Europeans, and the colonial authorities continuing to provide a pro-business

---

<sup>48</sup> See: Lady Raffles, *Memoir*, pp. 544-548. See also: C.B. Buckley, pp. 108-110.

<sup>49</sup> *Singapore Free Press*, 22 February 1850, p. 4, R0006016.

### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

administration. The addresses – beginning with the address to Raffles in 1823 – provide an insight into the thinking of the Asian and European merchants in nineteenth-century Singapore, and specifically the fact that, not surprisingly, they shared an appreciation of the pro-business laws and policies of the administration here.

Another insight into an Asian perspective on the pro-business policy of Singapore may be found in the autobiography of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, a Malay language scholar and teacher who was of mixed Arab and Indian ancestry. Abdullah argued that British administration in the Straits Settlements was superior to traditional governance in the Malay states. He believed that Malay rulers discouraged economic development in their territories by oppressing their subjects and depriving them of their property. By contrast, Abdullah described the Straits Settlements under British government as free of oppression.<sup>50</sup>

Clearly, the appreciation of the advantages of the free trade policies of the Settlement of Singapore did not require any cultural assimilation on the part of Asian merchants. The advantages of this policy were obvious to merchants of any cultural background. The free port and free trade policy, combined with a policy of tolerance for different customs and religions, in a location such as Singapore, ensured that the place would acquire a population of immigrants with a wide variety of cultures. Since this variety was so wide, and since the immigrants from different places arrived in large numbers and quickly established self-contained communities, the free port policy actually tended to perpetuate cultural diversity over time.

---

<sup>50</sup> Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, *The Story of the Voyage of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, Munshi*, an English translation of *Kesah Pelayaran Abdullah*, translated by A.E. Coope, quoted in *Malaysia: Selected Historical Readings*, compiled by John Bastin and Robin W. Winks, pp. 142-151. See also: Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, *The Hikayat Abdullah*, translated by A.H. Hill, p. 312; the Introduction of this book provides information on Abdullah's life and ancestry.

## *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

Europeans appreciated the Chinese especially for the qualities which made them successful in business – in particular, they praised the Chinese in Singapore for their enterprising and industrious nature. The adjectives *industrious* and *enterprising* were fitting descriptions of the qualities of successful entrepreneurs, who needed to be innovative and energetic in seeking out business opportunities, as well as hardworking. Raffles used these adjectives to describe the Chinese in 1819,<sup>51</sup> and these two words were used together repeatedly to publicly describe the Chinese over the years. For example, when Lord Dalhousie, the Governor-General of India, visited Singapore in 1850, he publicly praised the Chinese merchants of Singapore for these two qualities, and his words were reported in the press.<sup>52</sup> In 1859, Laurence Oliphant, the Private Secretary to Lord Elgin, told the reading public in Britain that the Chinese and Anglo-Saxon populations in Singapore represented the world's two most enterprising and industrious races.<sup>53</sup> In 1860, the *Singapore Free Press* not only noted the enterprise and industry of the Chinese, but also asserted that the Chinese were the *Anglo-Saxons of the East*.<sup>54</sup> The *Singapore Free Press* attributed most of the credit for the prosperity of the Straits Settlements *circa* 1860 to the industry and labour of the Chinese.<sup>55</sup>

In 1865, John Cameron informed this same reading public that the Chinese were the most valuable section of the population of the Straits Settlements.<sup>56</sup> Sir Frederick Weld praised the Chinese in the Straits Settlements and the Protected Malay States as enterprising as well as industrious in a paper he presented to the Royal Colonial Institute

---

<sup>51</sup> Sir Stamford Raffles, "Minutes by Sir T.S. Raffles, on the Establishment of a Malay College at Singapore," in: Lady Raffles, *Memoir*, Appendix pp. 29 and 31.

<sup>52</sup> *Singapore Free Press*, 22 February 1850, p. 4, R0006016.

<sup>53</sup> Laurence Oliphant, *Narrative of The Earl of Elgin's Mission to China and Japan in the Years 1857, '58, '59*, Volume I, p. 39.

<sup>54</sup> *Singapore Free Press*, 9 February 1860 p. 3, R0006023.

<sup>55</sup> *Singapore Free Press*, 6 January 1860, p. 1, R0006023.

<sup>56</sup> John Cameron, p. 138.

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

in 1884.<sup>57</sup> Sir Hugh Clifford publicly extolled the importance of Chinese capitalists and labourers in the development of Singapore's Malayan hinterland, arguing that, without the Chinese, the British could have accomplished very little there.<sup>58</sup> In an article published in the London *Daily Mail* in 1906, G.E. Raine, who was once a member of the legal firm of Allen & Gledhill, praised the Chinese of Singapore and Malaya for their enterprise and their loyalty to the Crown; he informed his British audience about the economic interdependence of Chinese and Britons here, especially with regard to the rubber planting and tin mining industries.<sup>59</sup>

Sir Frank Swettenham also praised the Chinese in the Malayan hinterland, noting their industry and enterprise, in his book *British Malaya*.<sup>60</sup> This book was first published in 1906, and reprinted in 1907, 1920, 1929, 1948, and 1955. This book likely had some influence in forming British public opinion about Singapore and Malaya in the colonial period; when George Peet was preparing to leave Britain for Singapore in 1923, Swettenham's book was the only book he could find about Singapore.<sup>61</sup> Sir Frank Swettenham told a gathering of the Overseas Chinese Society in England in 1922 that the prosperity of the Straits Settlements and the Malay States was mostly thanks to Chinese industry and enterprise; his remarks in praise of the Chinese were reported in the *Straits*

---

<sup>57</sup> Sir Frederick A. Weld, "The Straits Settlements and British Malaya." A paper presented to the Royal Colonial Institute on 10 June 1884. In: Paul H. Kratoska, editor. *Honourable Intentions: Talks on the British Empire in South-East Asia delivered at the Royal Colonial Institute 1874-1928*, p. 74.

<sup>58</sup> Sir Hugh Clifford, "A Lesson from the Malay States," in: *The Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 84, No. 505 (November 1899), p. 599.

<sup>59</sup> G.E. Raine, "The King's Chinese," quoted in: Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 391; there is also a reference to Raine's article in Song's article "The King's Chinese: Their Cultural Evolution From Immigrants to Citizens of a Crown Colony", in the 1936 *Straits Times Annual*, p. 38; Song noted that Raine's article was published in the *Daily Mail* in 1906, but Song did not provide the date of publication.

<sup>60</sup> Sir Frank Swettenham, *British Malaya: An Account of the Origin and Progress of British Influence in Malaya*, p. 301.

<sup>61</sup> George Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, p. 10.



*Times*.<sup>62</sup> These examples of praise of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya by Europeans suggest that European elites here were highly appreciative of the contributions of the Chinese to the success of the colonial system here, and that these Europeans realised that the presence of the Chinese was essential.

It may well be that these statements of praise of the economic importance of the Chinese functioned didactically to encourage interested Europeans to have positive attitudes about the Chinese. When Europeans praised the Chinese for their industrious and enterprising nature, they were not only thinking these things about the Chinese; these Europeans were also telling each other these things, by publishing them in the press to be read by European readers, both here and elsewhere. This reinforced positive attitudes towards the Chinese, especially European appreciation of the contributions of the Chinese. Naturally, such positive attitudes would have influenced the pro-business culture of Europeans in Singapore, and facilitated cooperation between Chinese and Europeans.

European praise of Chinese industry and enterprise was both an expression of an aspect of the pro-business cultural values of the Europeans here, as well as a means of sustaining a consensus on these values among interested Europeans. Europeans who were familiar with the situation in Singapore informed other Europeans about the economic value of the Chinese population here to European interests, and especially to British interests. The message was that there was nothing wrong with the Settlement of Singapore – a city created and protected by the British Empire – having a population largely composed of Chinese immigrants; on the contrary, the message insisted that the

---

<sup>62</sup> The report on the Overseas Chinese Society's fourth annual dinner, which took place at the Ritz Hotel on 21 December 1922, appeared in the *Straits Times* on 29 January 1923, R0016599.

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

presence of these Chinese immigrants was essential to British interests here. Thus, the examples of Europeans informing other Europeans in various publications over the years about the enterprising and industrious nature of the Chinese here may be interpreted as a means of promoting cultural values and consensus among interested Britons, as well as other Europeans with interests in Singapore – a consensus that it was important for European officials and businessmen to sustain a tolerant attitude toward the Chinese majority here, to welcome more Chinese immigrants, and to respect their rights and customs, for the sake of the continuance of the mutually-beneficial patterns of economic cooperation and partnership between Chinese and Europeans in Singapore and its Malayan hinterland.

In effect, these Britons were – through their published writings – reminding their compatriots that the British needed to maintain their end of the bargain which made possible the mutually-beneficial commercial symbiosis between Asians and Europeans in Singapore – that is, the policy of appreciation for, and tolerance of, the Chinese majority in Singapore and their distinctive culture. This was cultural accommodation; just as Chinese and other Asian merchants, as well as European merchants, occasionally reminded colonial officialdom about the importance of maintaining the free port and free trade policies, so too did British commentators remind their compatriots about the importance of the Chinese in Singapore. For Singapore to continue to work, it required officialdom to accommodate business culture, and the Europeans of Singapore to accommodate themselves to the Chinese majority. It was essential that the European minority in Singapore not make itself overbearing or insufferable towards the Chinese, upon whom they depended so much.

## **Chinese Banks**

European appreciation of Chinese business was also manifested concretely – for example, in the ways in which European businessmen and officialdom assisted Chinese banks in their times of need during the early years of these banks, in the first half of the twentieth century. When the Chinese Commercial Bank experienced difficulties in 1914, the colonial authorities intervened to rescue the bank. The intervention of the colonial government to save the Chinese Commercial Bank in 1914, was a clear example of official support for a prominent Chinese bank, while the advice given by European banks to Chinese banks over the years is evidence of private sector European appreciation of the importance of Chinese businessmen and their institutions, and a recognition of the symbiotic or interdependent nature of the relationship between Asian and European businesses.

The development of Chinese banking in Singapore involved both change and continuity, as Chinese capitalists shifted from a form of capital accumulation connected with the opium business which they had practiced for many years, to new forms which they adopted from the West and adapted to their own requirements. The entry of wealthy Chinese businessmen into the banking industry in the first two decades of the twentieth century must be seen in the historical context of the end of the practice of the farming out of the opium revenue monopoly to Chinese capitalists, which occurred on New Year's Eve 1909. Carl Trocki and Lee Kam Hing have each explained that the opium revenue farming system offered opportunities for capital accumulation by Chinese capitalists, and so the termination of this system closed off an important avenue for Chinese capital

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

accumulation, while the banking and insurance industries offered new alternatives.<sup>63</sup> Five Chinese banks commenced operations in Singapore during the first two decades of the twentieth century – that is, they were founded within ten years before and after the termination of the opium revenue farming system in 1909. The first Chinese bank in Singapore was the Kwong Yik Bank, founded in 1903, and it was followed by a number of other banks, including: the Sze Hai Tong Bank in 1907, the Chinese Commercial Bank in 1912, the Ho Hong Bank in 1917, and the Oversea-Chinese Bank in 1919, to name only those early Chinese banks founded before 1920; the last three banks listed here merged to form the Oversea-Chinese Banking Corporation in 1932.<sup>64</sup>

Meanwhile, Chinese capitalists also founded insurance companies: the Eastern United Assurance Company began operations by 1914 with Tan Chay Yan as its founding chairman, while the Overseas Assurance Corporation was established in 1920 under the chairmanship of Dr. Lim Boon Keng.<sup>65</sup> Considering the historical context, the development of these Chinese banking and insurance companies may be interpreted as a move by the Chinese business community to adapt to the changing climate for capital accumulation – specifically, the end of the farming out of the opium monopoly – by adopting the Western forms of banking and insurance. So, this development in Chinese business practices – and, perhaps, a change in Chinese business culture as well – may seem at first glance to represent a Westernisation of Chinese business culture, yet, upon closer examination, the founding of the Chinese banks may be seen as a continuation of

---

<sup>63</sup> Carl A. Trocki, *Opium and Empire*, pp. 203, 234, and 237-238; Lee Kam Hing, “The Emergence,” in Suryadinata, *Ethnic Chinese*, pp. 224-225.

<sup>64</sup> Tan Ee Leong, “The Chinese Banks,” pp. 113-127.

<sup>65</sup> Lee Kam Hing, “The Emergence,” in Suryadinata, *Ethnic Chinese*, pp. 230 and 235-236. Lee Kam Hing states that the Eastern United Assurance Company was started in 1914 on p. 230, and in 1913 on p. 235.

the history of Chinese capitalists looking for profitable ways to put their capital to work in Singapore.

The development of the early Chinese banks in Singapore may be seen as the adoption of the forms of certain aspects of Western business culture as a thin veneer over what was substantially a continuation of traditional Chinese business culture. These early Chinese banks did not operate according to the basic principles of Western banks – that is, attracting and concentrating the capital of many depositors from among the general public by offering to pay interest on their deposits, and then mobilising this concentrated capital for investment through lending to qualified borrowers, with the profits of interest earned on loans thus rewarding both the depositors and the owners of the bank – in effect, a partnership between the bank and the public. In short, Western banking is about bankers *using other people's money* to make more money, by loaning out other people's savings to the public. Instead, the early Chinese banks, as described by local banker Yap Pheng Geck, were founded as Chinese family businesses, and they were devoted to investing the personal capital of the owners and their friends, rather than the savings of depositors drawn from among the general public. Yap Pheng Geck recalled that, in the early days, the Chinese banks did not even bother to receive savings deposits, because these banks felt that such deposits were not worth the accounting tasks which the calculation of their interest payments would have necessarily entailed. With regard to lending, the early Chinese banks mainly loaned their capital to friends of the bank directors, based on relationships characterised by personal trust.<sup>66</sup> This was in contrast with Western banking practice, in which banks lend funds impersonally to members of the general public, based upon impersonal calculations of collateral and risk. In short, the

---

<sup>66</sup> Yap Pheng Geck, *Scholar, Banker, Gentleman Soldier*, p. 37.

### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

early Chinese banks here involved Chinese businessmen becoming bankers so that they could use mainly *their own money* to make more money.

Thus, the early Chinese banks, despite their outwardly Westernised appearances, were basically vehicles for the Chinese businessmen who owned them, as well as their close friends and associates, to invest their own personal capital. In this way, traditional Chinese business culture continued within business organisations which assumed the outward forms of Western business culture. The differences between Chinese and Western banks here in the early twentieth century paralleled the differences between Chinese and Western business cultures – the Chinese banks were centred around personalities and inner circles of key people connected by personal ties of kinship and friendship, while Western business culture was typified by public corporations which were more institutionalised and less personal. In sociological terminology, traditional Chinese business culture may be described as being characterised by *Gemeinschaft* relationships, while modern Western business culture may be described as being characterised by *Gesellschaft* relationships.<sup>67</sup> In the early development of the Chinese banks here, local Chinese businessmen selected and adopted only those elements of Western business culture which they determined to be conducive to their interests, while remaining essentially faithful to the traditional patterns of Chinese business culture. In considering the history of Chinese business culture in colonial Singapore, it is important to avoid being confused by outward appearances. To see the establishment of the early Chinese banks as an example of some sort of Westernisation or Anglicisation of Chinese business elites and their business culture would be a great oversimplification.

---

<sup>67</sup> Regarding *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, see: Gordon Marshall, editor, *A Dictionary of Sociology*, pp. 249 and 669.

### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

Although the business-oriented cultures of Asian and European elites brought them together to some degree, it must be noted that these cultures did not merge – Chinese businessmen retained their own distinct business culture. Rather than describing the Chinese businessmen as Westernising, it might be more accurate to say that they created a hybrid and layered business culture, with certain Western elements superimposed upon an essentially Chinese core. Chinese businessmen continued to do business in their own time-honoured way, in accord with traditional Chinese business culture, and were reluctant to completely adopt foreign and unfamiliar Western business practices.

A number of leading Chinese businessmen helped pioneer the Chinese banking industry in Singapore. Wong Ah Fook, a prominent building contractor, founded the Kwong Yik Bank in 1903. Lee Choon Guan of the Straits Steamship Company helped establish the Chinese Commercial Bank in 1912. Lim Peng Siang, who was born in China and became prominent in shipping and other industries in Singapore, was another of the founders of the Chinese Commercial Bank, and he also founded the Ho Hong Bank in 1917. Aw Boon Haw of Tiger Balm renown was a Director and a major shareholder of the Ho Hong Bank. Lim Nee Soon was the first Chairman of the Board of the Oversea-Chinese Bank, while one of the bank's major shareholders was Oei Tiong Ham, who made his money in the sugar industry in Java and who was reputedly Asia's richest man when he died at his Singapore home in Dalvey Road in 1924. Dr. Lim Boon Keng, who was prominent in business circles as well as a medical professional and a leading public figure, helped to establish the Chinese Commercial Bank, the Ho Hong Bank, and the Oversea-Chinese Bank, and he served as the first Vice-Chairman of the Board of the

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

Chinese Commercial Bank and the Chairman of the Board of the Oversea-Chinese Bank.<sup>68</sup>

Moreover, such Westernisation of Chinese business as did happen, occurred mainly rather late in the colonial period – after 1900 – and thus long after the establishment of the cosmopolitan elite class here. The partial assimilation of Western or modern concepts into Chinese business culture here in the later stages of the colonial period was therefore a contributing factor towards the strengthening and further integration of the elite class, but it was certainly not a precipitating cause or catalyst.

In spite of the attention given here to differences between Chinese and Western businesses, this description is not meant to essentialise or stereotype Chinese business culture and practice as being essentially different from the tradition in the West; on the contrary, taking a longer view of the history of business culture in both hemispheres of the world, the similarities may be more important than the differences. Family businesses have traditionally been just as much a feature of the European heritage as the Chinese. The distinctive aspects of modern Western business culture and organisation are relatively recent historical developments. In the Middle Ages, businesses in Europe may have resembled their counterparts in China, in the sense of being personalised and family-oriented.

The modern Western business culture and methods of organisation which European businessmen brought to Singapore – a culture characterised by the separation of ownership from management – is a culture which developed in the West in only relatively recent times. The innovations of joint-stock companies or public limited-

---

<sup>68</sup> Tan Ee Leong, “The Chinese Banks,” pp. 113-127. Regarding Oei Tiong Ham, see: *Malaya Tribune*, 4 June 1924, p. 7, R0005841. Regarding Lim Boon Keng as the Chairman of the Oversea-Chinese Bank, see: *Singapore Free Press*, 14 September 1920, p. 6, R0006139.



### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

liability corporations in the West are products of the modern era, which later spread to Asia. There is every reason to think that Asians can adopt modern business culture and methods of organisation, just as Westerners adopted these innovations at an earlier time. Moreover, the shift from traditional to modern business culture and organisation is not an either-or proposition; the family business model and other elements of traditional business culture have persisted in the West, and can also persist in Asia alongside modern developments. It may take the form of selective adoption and synthesis, with Asian and Western elements coexisting within a single economic entity – as in the example of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce, or regarding the Chinese banks and other companies in colonial Singapore.

Western and Chinese business cultures – as well as other Asian business cultures – featured certain similarities or points of common interest which allowed Asian and European business elites to work together for mutual profit. These elites brought their business cultures with them from their homelands, so when they arrived here, they were already inclined to cooperate with one another despite ethnic differences. European official elites brought with them a political or governmental culture which embraced a pro-business outlook, and this predisposed them to cooperate with business elites of various ethnicities here. After settling here, Asian and European elites developed a certain amount of appreciation for each other's cultures, and adapted to one another to some degree. However, they certainly did not merge together into a single business culture; Chinese businesses, for example, maintained patterns of operation which were distinctly different from prevailing Western businesses practices. Likewise, in the realm of what may be described as *unofficial* political organisation, there were cultural

### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

differences between the Chinese and the European business elites in terms of how they tended to organise and unify themselves.

Leading local European businessmen of different ethnic groups managed to overcome these differences sufficiently to unify the Western business community to some degree through the establishment of the Singapore Chamber of Commerce in 1837, an organisation which included not only British businessmen, but also businessmen of other ethnic identities – American, Arab, Chinese, German, Jewish, Mogul, Parsi, and Portuguese.<sup>69</sup> Meanwhile, the Chinese business elites of the nineteenth century apparently preferred organisations which were aligned with dialect group identities or other subdivisions within the Chinese population; it was not until 1906 that the Chinese business elite overcame such differences sufficiently to establish the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce, a prestigious organisation which unified the Chinese elites of all major dialect groups, and even involved Straits Chinese elites.<sup>70</sup> The Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce incorporated elements of both Chinese and Western business cultures.

Much of the convergence of the business and political cultures of Chinese and European elites here occurred *after* they had already converged socially as a cosmopolitan elite class. If Chinese and other Asian business cultures tended to resemble Western business culture more and more, especially in the later decades of the colonial period, it was probably more of a *result* of the social integration of the cosmopolitan elite class than a *cause*.

---

<sup>69</sup> See the list of firms in the Singapore Chamber of Commerce in the 1848 edition of *The Singapore Almanack and Directory*, p. 24, R0011768.

<sup>70</sup> Regarding English-speaking Chinese in the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce, see: Yap Pheng Geck, *Scholar, Banker, Gentleman Soldier*, p. 104.

## **Sports and Recreation**

The historical development of sports and recreation in Singapore involved a degree of cultural convergence among Asian and European elites. This process may have begun with sea sports. European and Malay elites shared an interest in competitive sailing, and the Europeans developed an admiration for the racing skills of Malay *sampan* and *kolek* sailors. According to George Windsor Earl, Malays and Europeans frequently took part in boat races in Singapore in the 1830s.<sup>71</sup> W.H. Read, who arrived in Singapore in 1841, praised the Malays for their sailing ability.<sup>72</sup> In the 1850s, he shared ownership of a yacht with Cursetjee Frommurzee, a prominent Parsi merchant who was John Little's business partner.<sup>73</sup>

The New Year's Day sports was an institution in colonial Singapore which enjoyed a long history and attracted interest from Asians and well as Europeans. A regatta took place near the mouth of the Singapore River and the Padang on New Year's Day in 1834, as was reported the day after in the *Singapore Chronicle*,<sup>74</sup> and this event became an annual sporting tradition in colonial Singapore, which continued into the early 1960s.<sup>75</sup> Sports also traditionally took place on land at the Padang in celebration of each new year. These annual events attracted a great deal of interest from Asians, both as participants and as spectators, who gathered in large numbers at the Padang to watch the sports. The crowds of spectators even included Asian women. Newspaper accounts indicated that the presence of women at these public sporting events was remarkable. In 1865, the *Singapore Free Press* noted that women were allowed to appear publicly *en*

---

<sup>71</sup> George Windsor Earl, *The Eastern Seas*, pp. 357-358.

<sup>72</sup> W.H. Read, *Play and Politics*, pp. 140-141.

<sup>73</sup> C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, pp. 629 and 350.

<sup>74</sup> *Singapore Chronicle*, 2 January 1834, p. 3, R0009224.

<sup>75</sup> Andrew Leslie, "Brink of a Cultural Flowering," *The Straits Times Annual*, 1982, photo caption p. 34.

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

*masse* only on New Year's Day.<sup>76</sup> A newspaper report of the 1879 New Year's Sports described Asian women and their families riding around the Padang in many hack gharries – hired horse-drawn carriages – from which the hidden occupants were concealed from view but could gaze out unseen at the proceedings.<sup>77</sup>

Meanwhile, prominent Europeans who were interested in horseracing established a racecourse on the Balestier Plain (hence the name of Racecourse Road), at the site which later became Farrer Park. They held their first horse race there in 1843. This racecourse became an important social and sporting institution, operated by the prestigious Singapore Sporting Club. Asian elites soon became involved in horseracing alongside the Europeans, and continued their involvement throughout the colonial period and beyond – as owners of racehorses, donors of trophies, Club members, and gamblers on races. The names of the owners of horses and the donors of trophies were prominently reported in the press; these newspaper articles provide an excellent record of the names of Asians and Europeans who were some of the leading members of the cosmopolitan elite class. For example, a race meeting in 1857 featured horse races for trophies donated by Tan Kim Ching and the Temenggong of Johore.<sup>78</sup>

Chinese residents of Singapore who were interested in horseracing donated a number of trophies during the nineteenth century, including the Confucius Cup, the Singapore Chinese Cup, and the Celestial Plate.<sup>79</sup> Opium Farmer Cheang Hong Lim

---

<sup>76</sup> *Singapore Free Press*, 5 January 1865, p. 2, R0006027.

<sup>77</sup> *Straits Times Overland Journal*, 4 January 1879, p. 2, R0006771.

<sup>78</sup> *Singapore Free Press*, 21 May 1857, p. 4, R0006022.

<sup>79</sup> Confucius Cup: *Straits Times* 24 July 1869, p. 1, R0016422, and Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 154. Singapore Chinese Cup: *Straits Times* 28 June 1897, p. 3, R0016457. Celestial Plate: *Straits Times* 27 November 1869, p. 1, R0016422, and 13 May 1876, p. 2, R0016425, and Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 154.

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

contributed the Hong Lim Cup,<sup>80</sup> while Koh Cheng Hooi presented the Opium and Spirit Farmers' Cup<sup>81</sup> and the gambier and pepper merchants donated the Kongkek Cup.<sup>82</sup> The ruling dynasty of Johore donated the Maharajah's Cup and the Sultan's Cup.<sup>83</sup> Local Arab gentlemen presented the Arab Cup and the Chettiars of Singapore donated the Coromandel Vase,<sup>84</sup> while the Parsi community here contributed the Parsee Cup.<sup>85</sup> Meanwhile, other trophies were donated by European elites. The Governor's Cup and the Tanglin Club Cup were contributed by British elites<sup>86</sup> – but they were not the only Europeans who donated trophies: the Germans who belonged to the Teutonia Club<sup>87</sup> presented the Teutonia Cup<sup>88</sup> in its name, while August Huttenbach, a German businessman who became a British subject,<sup>89</sup> donated the Moracia Cup.<sup>90</sup>

The races attracted the interest of horse owners of a variety of ethnic groups. The horseracing enthusiasts who entered their horses in the spring race meeting in 1876 included Tan Seng Poh, Hadjee Arshaad, N.P. Joaquim, A.C. Moses, and Mr. Eranee, while Chua Soo Tuan, Seah Eng Keat, Tan Boo Liat, Koh Ewe Cheng, the Maharajah of Johore, and Sir Frank Swettenham entered their horses in the Diamond Jubilee race

---

<sup>80</sup> Cheang Hong Lim's Cup: *Straits Times* 13 May 1876, p. 2, R0016425; J.D. Vaughan, *Manners and Customs*, p. 42; and Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 154.

<sup>81</sup> Koh Cheng Hooi's Opium and Spirit Farmers' Cup: *Singapore Daily Times* 10 January 1882, p. 3, R0010200.

<sup>82</sup> Kongkek Cup: *Straits Times* 1 May 1880, p. 1, R0016427, and Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 154. The *Kongkek* was the Pepper and Gambier Society founded in Singapore in 1867; see: Chiang Hai Ding, *A History of Straits Settlements Foreign Trade 1870-1915*, p. 52.

<sup>83</sup> Sultan's Cup: *Straits Times* 28 June 1897, p. 3, R0016457. Maharajah's Cup: *Straits Times* 24 April 1880, p. 2, R0016427.

<sup>84</sup> Arab Cup and Coromandel Vase: *Straits Times* 24 April 1880, p. 2, R0016427.

<sup>85</sup> Parsee Cup: *Straits Times* 13 May 1876, p. 2, R0016425.

<sup>86</sup> Governor's Cup: *Straits Times* 13 May 1876, p. 2, R0016425. Tanglin Club Cup: *Straits Times* 24 April 1880, p. 2, R0016427.

<sup>87</sup> Regarding the Teutonia Club, see: Emil Helfferich, *A Company History: Behn, Meyer & Co.*, Volume I, p. 106, and Volume II, pp. 48-52 and 122.

<sup>88</sup> Teutonia Cup: *Straits Times* 27 November 1869, p. 1, R0016422, and 24 April 1880, p. 1, R0016427.

<sup>89</sup> Regarding August Huttenbach, see: Emil Helfferich, *A Company History: Behn, Meyer & Co.*, Volume II, p. 48.

<sup>90</sup> Moracia Cup: *Straits Times* 24 April 1880, p. 1, R0016427.

## *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

meeting in 1897.<sup>91</sup> This pattern of multiethnic involvement in horseracing was established in the nineteenth century and persisted into the twentieth century.

The history of sports culture in colonial Singapore involved the steady proliferation over time of sports and sporting clubs, with many Asians developing interests in European sports. Interest in sports among the Chinese population blossomed in the time period including the late nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century. By the 1930s, the Chinese of Singapore were holding their own sports Olympiads – the first Chinese Olympic games for competitors from all of the Malay States and the Straits Settlements was held in Singapore in 1931;<sup>92</sup> by this time, even Chinese girls were actively involved in competitive sports, including volleyball and badminton.<sup>93</sup> However, certain European sports were slower to catch on among the Chinese. Even as late as the 1930s, the sports of competitive yachting and rowing had still not attracted the interest of the Chinese in Singapore;<sup>94</sup> but in 1956, Singapore was represented in the yacht racing section of the Melbourne Olympics by a team which included Robert Ho, who was then a lecturer in the Geography Department of the University of Malaya in Singapore.<sup>95</sup>

This brief review of selected aspects of the history of sports in colonial Singapore – with an emphasis on elite sporting activities – indicates that there was a degree of

---

<sup>91</sup> 1876 spring race meeting: *Straits Times* 13 May 1876, p. 2, R0016425. Diamond Jubilee races: *Straits Times* 28 June 1897, p. 3, R0016457. See also the list of horse racing trophies and their winners in *The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1888*, p. 63, R0011833.

<sup>92</sup> *British Malaya*, May 1931, p. 8.

<sup>93</sup> *Malaya Tribune*, 13 May 1937, p. 22, R0005944; 25 June 1937, p. 5, R0005945; R.H.C. Laverton, "Malaya Becomes Sport-Minded: The Asiatic Sweeps the Board," in the 1936 *Straits Times Annual*, pp. 104 and 107. See also: *British Malaya*, October 1933, p. 133.

<sup>94</sup> Laverton, p. 104.

<sup>95</sup> Regarding Prof. Robert Ho and the 1956 Olympics, I am grateful to Dr. K.G. Tregonning, MBE, Vesa Tikander of the *Urheilukirjasto* (the Sports Library of Finland), and to the late Jack Snowden, OBE, for kindly providing me with information. A brief biography of Robert Ho was published in *The Who's Who in Malaysia 1963*, edited and published by J. Victor Morais, p. 103. See also: K.G. Tregonning, *Home Port Singapore: An Australian Historian's Experience 1953-1967*, pp. 61-62.

### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

cultural convergence of Asian and European elites through sports. However, this cultural convergence was limited, partly in terms of which sports were involved, but mainly in terms of time frame.

While there was a great deal of cultural convergence in the sporting realm between Asian and European elites, it is clear that this convergence cannot have been a major factor in the initial formation and integration of the elite class, since it happened *after* the class formation integration – sporting developments *followed* the social developments, not the other way around – so, it may have contributed to, or reinforced and facilitated the further integration of the elite class, but the social integration of the Asian and European elites was probably a greater factor in the sporting developments, than vice versa. This brief review of the development of sports within the cultural history of colonial Singapore reinforces the idea that the development of the cosmopolitan elite class was more about social history than cultural history.

#### **Language**

Clearly, shared languages played only a limited role in fostering a sense of shared class identity among Asian and European elites; and the fact that different groups of elites spoke different languages probably tended to divide the elite class along cultural lines at least as much as connections among at least *some* elites were facilitated by their shared knowledge of the English and Malay languages. Moreover, language differences not only tended to reinforce cultural divisions between Asians and Europeans, but also emphasised the distinctions between different groups of Asians and Europeans. The Asian and European populations in colonial Singapore were each divided into a variety of language or dialect groups – for example, the Chinese population included speakers of

## *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka, Hainanese, and Baba Malay, while the European population prior to World War One included such a large German component that a German visitor to Singapore in the 1890s noted that his native language was heard here nearly as often as English.<sup>96</sup>

### **Food and Beverages**

Tastes in food probably functioned more as a way of emphasising and affirming distinctive cultural identities, than as a means of fostering a sense of shared culture, although the fact that Europeans who lived in colonial Singapore and its Malayan hinterland developed a taste for curry may have helped to give them a sense of community, a subculture of their own, which at least some of them took back to Britain when they retired from the East – still, Asian and European elites of Singapore certainly did not adopt a single style of culinary culture. On the contrary, people here identified themselves with their various homelands and ethnic groups through distinctive foods. The characteristic cuisines of various regions of China and India were represented in colonial Singapore, along with Malay, Peranakan, and European foods. Once again, with regard to food as much as other cultural elements, culture served to divide the cosmopolitan elite class by emphasising cultural differences, at least as much as it functioned to unite elites by providing them with points of contact or shared interests and tastes.

### **Clothing**

Given the great variety of ethnic groups represented in colonial Singapore, it is no surprise that the crowds in the streets were conspicuous for their variety of clothing styles, which they brought with them to Singapore from their homelands. These styles

---

<sup>96</sup> Otto E. Ehlers, *On Horseback through Indochina*, Volume 3, p. 125.



### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

conspicuously indicated their distinct cultural identities. However, over the years, Asians and Europeans here adopted clothing customs which differed from the traditions of their respective homelands. Asian elites, in particular, adopted European clothing styles, especially in the early decades of the twentieth century, while Europeans developed clothing customs which were specific to the East. European men in colonial Singapore adopted a distinctive clothing style which featured a sun helmet called a *sola topee*, and a white tunic with a high collar called a *baju tutup* – this style was well established by 1900 as a kind of uniform for European men, and was still the norm in the 1920s.

The use of the Hindustani term *topee* and the Malay term *tutup* by Europeans in colonial Singapore instead of the English terms *sun helmet* and *tunic*, together with the wearing of these special white hats and suits, emphasised the distinctiveness of a European colonial subculture which was specific to the East. Another example was the use of the Malay term *tuan besar* by Europeans here to describe any leading local European businessman, as well as the terms *stengah* for a whisky soda, *pahit* for a cocktail, and *makan* for either *food* or *eating*. The use of these Asian terms by Europeans here, as well as their wearing of special articles of apparel with Asian names and their enthusiasm to *makan* spicy curry and rice for tiffin and dinner, was all part of their assertion of a distinct cultural identity which both unified them as a subculture of Europeans in Singapore and Malaya and also set them apart from their compatriots in their homelands. These special words, costumes, and foods were the codes, passwords, and rituals which identified those Europeans who had been initiated into the European

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

community of British Malaya.<sup>97</sup> These practices also provided Europeans here with at least some degree of cultural similarity – at least on a superficial level – with those individuals among the Asian population who also wore the *topee* and the *tutup*, who used Malay terminology, and who had a taste for spicy curry and rice.

While many prosperous Chinese men in Singapore adopted Western clothing fashions by the 1920s, elite Chinese women here opted for the modern Shanghai gowns which were fashionable in the 1930s, as shown in photos of Chinese ladies in prestigious settings, such as the Turf Club and Government House.<sup>98</sup>

The modern clothing adopted by Chinese elites in colonial Singapore, especially between the World Wars, was at least as much a result of keeping up with cultural trends in China as it was about Westernisation. Chinese who adopted Western-style clothing fashions were conforming with modern Chinese trends as much as they were conforming with Western culture. This conclusion is supported by the decision of Chinese ladies in the 1930s to opt for the fashionable and modern Shanghai gowns, rather than Western dresses. Moreover, the trend for prosperous Chinese of the professional and commercial classes to reject traditional Chinese clothing in favour of adopting modern styles – whether Western suits for Chinese gentlemen or Shanghai gowns for Chinese ladies – could be interpreted as serving particular social interests of the rising middle and upper classes of Chinese, both inside and outside China.

The adoption of Western clothing by rising Asian elites can serve their interests by helping them to challenge established social distinctions or ranks, as illustrated by certain Javanese elites in the early nineteenth century. Peter Carey has explained how

---

<sup>97</sup> See: Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, pp. 156-157; and: Charles Allen, editor, in association with Michael Mason, *Tales from the South China Seas*, p. 67.

<sup>98</sup> See the photo in Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, facing p. 78.

### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

ambitious Javanese elites challenged their country's traditional social hierarchy and asserted their own enhanced rank in part by wearing Western military uniforms.<sup>99</sup> Likewise, the rising commercial and professional classes in early Republican China may have found the adoption of Western and modern Shanghai clothing styles to be a means of challenging the traditional social order, an order in which the privileged status of mandarins was symbolised by their special costumes. Naturally, elite Chinese in Singapore followed cultural developments in China, even as they established schools in Singapore to instil a sense of Chinese identity among the young. While wealthy Chinese in Singapore in the late nineteenth century paid the Manchu government for the right to wear Mandarin costumes, by the 1920s, Chinese elites here no longer needed to pay for the trappings of the Manchu regime – instead, they could assert both their elite status and their independence from the traditional Mandarin-dominated social order by wearing Western or modern clothing.

#### **Layering**

There were varying degrees of cultural diffusion, assimilation, and acculturation, as well as accommodation and adaptation, among Asian and European elites, and these cultural developments facilitated social interaction among these elites, as well as their cooperation and integration as a class. However, their cultural assimilation was limited – it would be inaccurate to claim that all of the Asian elites became Anglicised or Westernised. Indeed, even as late in the colonial era as the 1920s, there were apparently only a small number of Asian elites here who were Westernised – George Peet, who joined the *Straits Times* as a reporter in 1923, recalled that there were so few Westernised Chinese,

---

<sup>99</sup> Peter Carey, "The British in Java, 1811-1816: A Javanese Account," in: J. van Goor, ed., *Trading Companies in Asia 1600-1830*, p. 151.

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

Eurasian, Arab, Jewish and Persian businessmen and professionals in Singapore at that time, that he actually knew the names of most of these individuals.<sup>100</sup> It would also be inaccurate to claim that the European elites who relished curry and who learned to speak the Malay or Chinese languages were thereby necessarily Malayanised, Sinicised, or Asianised. In fact, even those Asians who most thoroughly adopted European culture might be more accurately described as having *layered* cultural identities, rather than being Westernised or Anglicised, and the same might be said of those Europeans who immersed themselves in Asian culture.<sup>101</sup>

While a degree of cultural assimilation or acculturation certainly facilitated the social integration of Asian and European elites as a class, the cultural explanation is clearly inadequate to be regarded as the primary factor in the integration and cohesion of the elite class. While it is unlikely that many European elites could speak Chinese,<sup>102</sup> it must also be emphasised that not all Asian elites learned to speak English. It seems likely that the reason why Europeans noted that the Chinese businessman and Legislative Councillor Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa was a fluent speaker of English was precisely because it was rare for Chinese in Singapore in the mid-nineteenth century to speak English well; thus, Europeans probably considered Whampoa's excellent command of the English language to be especially remarkable and noteworthy.<sup>103</sup> Some Asian elites did not speak English – for example, the Chinese Babas spoke the Malay language, or, rather, Baba

---

<sup>100</sup> George L. Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, p. 26.

<sup>101</sup> Regarding the *layered* concept, versus *Anglicised*, see: Linda Colley, *Britons*, p. 163.

<sup>102</sup> In fact, a visitor to Singapore in 1857 claimed that there was no European here at that time who could understand Chinese; and the *Straits Times* reported in 1876 that, at most, only two Europeans in Singapore could speak Chinese; see: Laurence Oliphant, *Narrative of The Earl of Elgin's Mission to China and Japan in the Years 1857, '58, '59*, Volume I, p. 20, and the *Straits Times*, 17 June 1876, p. 1, R0016425.

<sup>103</sup> See the mention of Whampoa's English language fluency in the *Straits Times*, 3 April 1880, p. 1, and again on 5 June 1880, p. 2, R0016427; see also the first-hand descriptions in the memoirs of Edward H. Cree and Francis L. Hawks, quoted in D.J.M. Tate, *Straits Affairs The Malay World and Singapore*, pp. 46-47.

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

Malay. At a meeting of Asian and European residents in 1850 to discuss a proposed obelisk in honour of Lord Dalhousie, a German businessman named Theodor August Behn helped the Chinese by explaining the plans in the Malay language.<sup>104</sup> During a public banquet in 1880 in honour of the prominent British businessman W.H. Read, a leading member of the Chinese community named Tan Beng Swee spoke in the Malay language on behalf of the Chinese population here.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, Tan Beng Swee declined a seat on the Legislative Council in 1882 because of his limited knowledge of English.<sup>106</sup> In 1900, the *Straits Times* reported that Dr. Lim Boon Keng spoke both English and Malay *a la Chinoise* during a meeting at the Weekly Entertainment Club at Ann Siang Hill;<sup>107</sup> this suggests that, as late as 1900, significant numbers of the members of this prestigious club – presumably elite Straits Chinese businessmen – spoke Baba Malay, and were unable to understand Dr. Lim’s speech in English, and so Dr. Lim provided them with a speech in Baba Malay. This fact supports the view that it could be problematic to describe the Straits Chinese elite in Singapore as *Westernised* or *Anglicised* up to – and, perhaps, beyond – the opening of the twentieth century.

If even many Straits Chinese elites – who tended to have a reputation for being Westernised<sup>108</sup> – were, in fact, not proficient in English in the early twentieth century, then it is reasonable to speculate that among those Asian elites who were born outside of Singapore there were probably many who were not fluent in English. When the Alkaff Arcade on Collyer Quay was opened in 1909, Charles Burton Buckley was quoted in the

---

<sup>104</sup> C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 531. Regarding Theodor August Behn, a co-founder of the firm of Behn, Meyer & Co., see: Emil Helfferich, *A Company History: Behn, Meyer & Co.*, Volume One, pp. 47, 65-67.

<sup>105</sup> *Straits Times*, 29 May 1880, p. 2, R0016427.

<sup>106</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 212.

<sup>107</sup> *Straits Times*, 5 June 1900, p. 3, R0016463.

<sup>108</sup> See, for example, Henry Norman, *The Peoples and Politics of The Far East*, pp. 41-42.

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

*Straits Times* as saying that the wealthy Arab owners of this grand commercial building did not speak English.<sup>109</sup> The wealthy Chinese businessmen who led the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce from the time of its founding in 1906 to at least the Japanese conquest of Singapore in 1942 were known to be typically China-born, Chinese-speaking, and non-English educated.<sup>110</sup>

Asian elites in colonial Singapore chose to adopt certain aspects of Western culture, while still retaining their Asian heritage and identity. Even among those Asian elites who were well known in their own times to have adopted elements of Western culture, this cultural assimilation or accommodation was often selective, limited, and layered, as shown in the lives of Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa and Dr. Lim Boon Keng. In the nineteenth century, prosperous Chinese Babas enjoyed playing Western games such as bowling and billiards, as well as drinking brandy and soda,<sup>111</sup> and they took pride in their status as subjects of the British Empire. Yet these Babas also practiced Chinese customs: they celebrated the traditional Chinese lunar new year, dressed in Chinese-style clothing and wore their hair in the style known as the *tauchang* or queue at least until the overthrow of the Ch'ing Dynasty in 1911.<sup>112</sup> This hairstyle, which involved shaving part of the scalp and braiding the remaining hair into a long plait reaching below the waist, was worn by Chinese men since the seventeenth century as a way of showing their

---

<sup>109</sup> At the opening of the Alkaff Arcade on Collyer Quay in 1909, Mr. Buckley indicated that the owners of the building spoke Arabic, yet they spoke neither English nor *Scotch*; this was reported in the *Straits Times*, 29 November 1909, p. 7, R0016509. Ten Leu-Jiun kindly brought this article to my attention.

<sup>110</sup> C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power*, pp. 62, 64-66, 73, 74, and 87; and: Yap Pheng Geck, *Scholar, Banker, Gentleman Soldier*, pp. 104 and 117-118.

<sup>111</sup> J.D. Vaughan, *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese of the Straits Settlements*, pp. 3 and 40.

<sup>112</sup> "Chinese New Year" by "W" in: *Straits Times*, 29 January 1876, p. 2, R0016425; J.D. Vaughan, *The Manners and Customs*, pp. 2-3, 12, and 43; "Gone are the Days" by "As You Were" in: *British Malaya*, September 1949, p. 306; *Indiscreet Memories* by Edwin A. Brown, pp. 3-4. Some Chinese in Singapore rejected the queue in 1898 – see: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 44, 236, and 303; Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, pp. 214-215.

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

loyalty to the Manchu rulers of China during the Ch'ing Dynasty, and was worn even by Chinese men who lived outside of China. The overthrow of the Ch'ing Dynasty in 1911 was an occasion for the cutting of tauchangs in Singapore.<sup>113</sup>

The phenomenon of cultural layering was clearly illustrated by the Honourable Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa and his ideas about the education of his son.<sup>114</sup> A contractor for the Royal Navy, Whampoa was one of the leading Chinese businessmen in Singapore in the middle of the nineteenth century. Educated at Edinburgh, he spoke English well, and could entertain his European guests at his home in Singapore by quoting Shakespeare and Byron, as well as by singing a Chinese song.<sup>115</sup> He was quite popular among European businessmen and officials,<sup>116</sup> and entertained visiting European naval officers<sup>117</sup> and royalty<sup>118</sup> at his famous gardens in Serangoon.<sup>119</sup> His standing among the elite class was demonstrated in 1869, when he received the honour of appointment to a seat on the Legislative Council of the Crown Colony of the Straits Settlements, the first Chinese elite to hold that rank.<sup>120</sup> Queen Victoria made Whampoa a Companion of the Order of St. Michael and St. George, or CMG, in 1876, and he was publicly invested with the insignia

---

<sup>113</sup> Yap Pheng Geck, *Scholar, Banker, Gentleman Soldier*, p. 24. See also: Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 472, and Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, p. 238.

<sup>114</sup> See the discussion of Whampoa in: Yong Mun Cheong, "Some Thoughts on Modernization and Race Relations in the Political History of Singapore," in: Yong Mun Cheong, ed., *Asian Traditions and Modernization: Perspectives from Singapore*, pp. 65-66.

<sup>115</sup> Edward H. Cree, *The Cree Journals*, entry for 21 September 1844, p. 129.

<sup>116</sup> John Turnbull Thomson, *Some Glimpses into Life in the Far East*, pp. 307-311.

<sup>117</sup> Admiral of the Fleet the Hon. Sir Henry Keppel, *A Sailor's Life Under Four Sovereigns*, Volume III, pp. 13-14.

<sup>118</sup> *Straits Times*, 3 April 1880, p. 1, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016427.

<sup>119</sup> H.A.K. Whampoa's name was sometimes spelled Hoo Ah Kay, and sometimes Hoh Ah Kay. For information on his life, see his obituary, in the *Straits Times*, 3 April 1880, p. 1, R0016427, and the report on his investiture with the insignia of the CMG in the *Straits Times*, 13 May 1876, p. 2, R0016425. See also Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 51-56, as well as the discussion of Whampoa in Sir Cecil Clementi Smith's letter to the Colonial Office dated 3 December 1896, quoted in: Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, pp. 188-189.

<sup>120</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 55; see also *Straits Times*, 13 May 1876, p. 2, R0016425.

### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

of the CMG by Governor Jervois, an event that was reported in the press in Britain.<sup>121</sup> Yet, while Whampoa was culturally and socially successful among Europeans, he also treasured his Chinese heritage. When his son returned from his studies in Scotland wearing Western clothes, having cut off his queue and converted to Presbyterianism, Whampoa sent him to China to be resinicised.<sup>122</sup> This example suggests that it might be problematic to simplistically describe Asian elites as Anglicised, since this label may conceal or overlook deeper cultural complexity or layered identities.

Westernisation or cultural assimilation of Asian elites was limited, not only in terms of the *degree* of acculturation, but also in terms of historical time period – specifically, much of the assimilation of Asian elites here occurred only after the beginning of the twentieth century. This was true in a number of areas, including the establishment of Western-influenced economic institutions by Chinese businessmen, including Chinese-owned banks and the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce; the adoption of Western clothing and the replacement of the queue with Western hairstyles, especially after 1911; the formal education of the daughters of the Chinese elite class; and the adoption of Western outdoor sports by Chinese. But, even as the Chinese in Singapore became increasingly more familiar with the English language and Western culture in general in the early decades of the twentieth century, there was also a countervailing tendency, as many Chinese here became increasingly concerned with

---

<sup>121</sup> A report on Whampoa's investiture, together with an illustration of the ceremony, appeared in the *Illustrated London News* on 1 July 1876, which was reprinted in: D.J.M. Tate, *Straits Affairs*, pp. 46-47. See also the report in the *Straits Times*, 13 May 1876, p. 2, R0016425.

<sup>122</sup> The anecdote about Whampoa's son is found in Whampoa's obituary in the *Straits Times* and in Sir Cecil Clementi Smith's letter (mentioned above), as well as in Admiral Keppel's autobiography, *A Sailor's Life under Four Sovereigns*, quoted by Sir Ong Siang Song in *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 54: Admiral Keppel noted that Whampoa's son cut off his queue and converted to Presbyterianism while in Britain. Compare the account of Whampoa and his son with J.D. Vaughan, *The Manners and Customs*, p. 4.



### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

developments in China. These local Chinese studied Mandarin and emphasised their links to the Chinese nation and their shared identity as Chinese in Singapore, emphasising this identity rather than their more particular identities as members of specific dialect groups.

Even the adoption and adaptation by Chinese in Singapore of Western institutional concepts in the early twentieth century – for example, the institutional structure or constitution of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce, and the development of modern Chinese-language schools here – may have actually tended to make the Chinese even more distinct from the Europeans, orienting them more strongly towards China rather than bringing them closer to the West. The Chinese schools here demonstrated their China-centred cultural orientation by organising a procession in honour of a presidential election in China in 1918.<sup>123</sup> Similarly, the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce expressed its China-centred cultural and national orientation by flying the Chinese flag, and by flying this flag at half-mast for three days following the death of Sun Yat-sen in 1925.<sup>124</sup> The establishment of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the development of the modern Chinese schools in Singapore both involved finding ways to overcome differences between dialect group identities by potentially providing all Chinese here with shared institutions and a shared language which cut across dialect divisions, uniting the Chinese here and orienting them towards China.

---

<sup>123</sup> *The Malaya Tribune* evidently found this Chinese procession to be much more impressive than the rather disappointing ceremony held at the Padang a few weeks later on the occasion of the announcement of the terms of the Armistice ending World War One in November 1918; see the commentary on the armistice celebrations in: *Malaya Tribune*, 18 November 1918, p. 4, R0005814.

<sup>124</sup> Lawrence G. Mani, *Fifty Eight Years of Enterprise*, p. 101; see also pp. 103 and 105.

### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

Cultural developments among the Chinese population here which, on the surface, may have looked like Westernisation, was really about strengthening a sense of Chinese nationality. Even the development of Western-style sports among Chinese in Singapore in the 1930s, in the great Chinese Olympiads held here, was essentially about bringing Chinese together as Chinese through sports and orienting them towards China, even if the sports involved – and the idea of the Olympiad itself – were borrowed from the West. The late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century was a time when authorities in China were reaching out to Chinese overseas – and, at the same time (and perhaps more importantly) the leaders of Chinese communities overseas were reaching out to China by promoting the sense of Chinese nationality and the speaking of Mandarin among the overseas communities.

Cultural developments among the Chinese in Singapore in the early twentieth century were not necessarily orienting them more to the West – on the contrary, cultural developments were probably orienting them more towards China. This supports the argument that cultural developments – or, more especially, Westernisation – among Chinese elites cannot be accepted as the leading factor in the integration of the elite class here. While there were some Chinese elites here in the first half of the twentieth century who identified themselves, like Sir Ong Siang Song, as the King's Chinese, and thus oriented themselves towards the Empire, it would seem that increasing numbers of Chinese here were orienting themselves towards China. This is probably a fair description of the China-oriented (and China-born) Chinese business elites who led the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce at that time. All of this points towards

### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

something other than cultural assimilation or Westernisation as the central factor in the integration of the elite class.

These cultural developments in colonial Singapore occurred in an historical context of the increasing popularity of modernisation in China and in Chinese communities overseas. In the late nineteenth century, Chinese intellectuals began to promote the modernisation of China through the study and adoption of certain aspects of Western knowledge and culture. This intellectual movement became increasingly urgent after the modernised Japanese state defeated China in 1895. In the nineteenth century, Chinese identity was linked with the traditional past and the culture of imperial China; after 1911, Chinese identity was linked to a vision of the modern China of the future, a vision which was exemplified in Singapore by Tan Kah Kee and Dr. Lim Boon Keng. In 1937, Tan Kah Kee advocated the adoption of Western-style clothing by Chinese.<sup>125</sup>

While the increasing degree of acculturation of Asian elites in the first decades of the twentieth century facilitated the integration of the elite class at that time, it must be remembered that elite Asians and Europeans were already socially integrated as an elite class long before that point in time. Therefore, while the phenomenon of acculturation in the early decades of the twentieth century contributed to the later stages of elite class integration and cohesion, this was an elite class which had been formed in the previous century, at a time when Asian elites were less assimilated into Western culture. While cultural assimilation was an important contributing factor in elite class integration, it was certainly not the central factor.

It is clear that the development of the cosmopolitan elite class simply cannot be attributed mainly to cultural assimilation, acculturation, Anglicisation, or convergence.

---

<sup>125</sup> *Malaya Tribune*, 8 May 1937, p. 7.

### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

No single culture united the Asian and European elites as a class. Neither Western nor Eastern culture, nor any hybrid of both, could serve as a cultural common denominator to bring together all of these elites within a single shared cultural identity.

While there was a certain extent of cultural convergence between Asian and European elites, especially in the twentieth century, this convergence was far from total; while the cultural gap between these elites was narrowed, it was certainly not closed. The Asian and European elites who belonged to the cosmopolitan elite class were anything but a culturally homogenous group of people; on the contrary, they retained their distinct ethnic identities. This multiethnic elite class was even less culturally homogenised than the Celtic and Anglo-Saxon elites who made up the elite class in Britain; clearly, British history demonstrates that cultural differences are not insurmountable barriers to social integration.<sup>126</sup> However, Asian and European elites shared at least one very important characteristic: the appreciation of symbolic capital.

In colonial Singapore, Asian and European elites alike placed great value upon symbolic capital, in spite of their cultural differences. They shared an interest in symbolic capital regardless of whether or not they spoke a common language or shared any other cultural characteristics; the concept of *face* transcended (and still transcends) linguistic and cultural barriers. Indeed, the exchange of symbolic capital is an internationally intelligible means of communication which can bridge cultural differences, even in the absence of cultural assimilation – whether Westernisation or Easternisation. Symbolic capital was (and still is) understood and appreciated worldwide, whether it is called prestige, reputation, *face*, *nama*, or *mien-tzu*, just as social capital is also internationally understood and valued as networks, connections, and

---

<sup>126</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons*, pp. 6, 161-164, and 193.

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

*guanxi*.<sup>127</sup> This appreciation of symbolic capital on the part of elites was an elite cultural characteristic in its own right, a cultural characteristic which did, in fact, unite Asian and European elites. However, this was a cultural characteristic which belonged to elites around the world, so there was no need for cultural convergence in this regard between East and West – this worldwide elite cultural appreciation of symbolic capital was already fully developed long before the founding of the Settlement of Singapore.

Yong Mun Cheong has quite rightly pointed out the importance of *money* in encouraging solidarity between members of different races in colonial Singapore.<sup>128</sup> While the mutual interest in pecuniary rewards was certainly essential to many of the interactions between merchants of different races, the following pages will discuss how symbolic capital was an even more important unifying factor, at least among the elite class. Symbolic capital was a unifying factor which included the officials as much as the merchants and professionals of various races. Moreover, borrowing ideas from Veblen, it could be argued that the desire for additional wealth beyond the needs of subsistence or direct consumption among those who are already wealthy was really a disguised form of craving for the symbolic capital which could be bought with money – that is, prestige or face could be gained either through conspicuous consumption, or simply through the public reputation of possessing great wealth in any form.<sup>129</sup>

The striving for symbolic capital unified elites with otherwise quite different cultural backgrounds even more than the interest in acquiring material wealth, since all

---

<sup>127</sup> Nan Lin, “*Guanxi: A Conceptual Analysis*,” in Alvin Y. So, Nan Lin, and Dudley Poston, eds., *The Chinese Triangle of Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong: Comparative Institutional Analyses*, pp. 153-166.

<sup>128</sup> Yong Mun Cheong, “Some Thoughts on Modernization and Race Relations in the Political History of Singapore,” in: Yong Mun Cheong, ed., *Asian Traditions and Modernization: Perspectives from Singapore*, p. 66.

<sup>129</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, especially pp. 24-34.

### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

elites desired prestige, while wealth was the primary goal (or the means of gaining prestige) of only some elites. In colonial Singapore, the leading businessmen acquired far more wealth than the officials who spent their careers administering the Empire, yet the appreciation of symbolic capital united the colonial official elites with the private sector elites – even if they employed different methods to gain it. Colonial officials were presumably motivated mainly by concerns related to the duty, honour, and prestige involved in public service, rather than by interests in amassing great fortunes<sup>130</sup> – they would probably have had more success in making money if they had gone into business or the professions instead of the civil service. Rank and prestige could be valuable rewards in their own right. For example, when René Onraet recalled his arrival in Singapore in 1907 as a twenty-year-old Police Cadet, he remembered especially the pleasure of the authority conferred on him by the prestige of his uniform and its insignia of rank. A few pages later in his memoirs, he noted that many prosperous Asian and European businessmen and professionals earned far larger incomes than colonial civil servants.<sup>131</sup> Despite the differences in incomes, many colonial officials remained in the public sector year after year. Onraet continued in his own career as a police officer, and his service over the years was rewarded with promotion: he was the Inspector-General of Police in the Straits Settlements from 1935 to 1939.<sup>132</sup>

But officials were not the only elites who felt a sense of public duty and cherished the honour and prestige of public service. Businessmen and professionals also valued public service and treasured these forms of symbolic capital. Asian and European

---

<sup>130</sup> C. Wright Mills asserted that American politicians were often attracted to political careers by the prestige involved, rather than pecuniary interests. See: C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, p. 227.

<sup>131</sup> René Onraet, *Singapore – A Police Background*, pp. 5 and 12.

<sup>132</sup> *Who's Who in Malaya 1939*, p. 109; René Onraet, "The Old Police Force and The New," *British Malaya*, November 1940, pp. 111-112; and: *Straits Times*, 18 July 1949, p. 4, R0016818.

private-sector elites expressed their appreciation of public service and honour through their contributions to patriotic causes, such as those related to the defence of the Empire in wartime and the celebration of the monarchy in times of peace, as well as various other public service and charitable activities. European officials recognised that Asians cherished the symbolic capital of official honours.<sup>133</sup> For example, René Onraet noted the prestige and honour connected with the weapons which were issued to Asian policemen in Malaya.<sup>134</sup>

Moreover, Chinese elites in Singapore potentially felt overlapping senses of duty to support public-spirited efforts not only in Singapore and the Empire, but also in China. One prominent example was Dr. Lim Boon Keng, OBE, who was active in the medical profession and in business circles, and also took a great deal of interest in public service at the end of the nineteenth century and in the first several decades of the twentieth century.<sup>135</sup>

### **Dr. Lim Boon Keng, OBE**

Dr. Lim was born in Singapore in 1869, attended Raffles Institution, won a Queen's Scholarship in 1887, and went to Scotland to study medicine, graduating from the University of Edinburgh in 1892.<sup>136</sup> Although his chosen field was the medical profession, Dr. Lim's family was historically connected with the local business scene: his father and grandfather both worked with Cheang Hong Lim, the prominent spirit and

---

<sup>133</sup> Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, pp. 185-199.

<sup>134</sup> Rene Onraet, *Singapore – A Police Background*, p. 74.

<sup>135</sup> Information on the career of Dr. Lim Boon Keng may be found in: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, especially pp. 234-238, 305, 333, 386-387, 389, 507-508, 522-524, 526-527, and 532-533.

<sup>136</sup> Victor Sim, editor, *Biographies of Prominent Chinese in Singapore*, p. 1; Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, pp. 203-204; Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 234-235.

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

opium farmer.<sup>137</sup> Dr. Lim returned to Singapore in 1893, where he began practicing medicine in a Telok Ayer Street shophouse; he eventually established the Kiu Su Tong Dispensary, Singapore's first Chinese dispensary.<sup>138</sup> Dr. Lim reportedly became quite successful in the medical profession in the 1890s – an item in the *Straits Times* in 1897 estimated that he was earning a thousand dollars each month from his medical practice.<sup>139</sup> Some idea of the buying power of a dollar in Singapore at that time is suggested by the fact that, in 1897, a bakery in Stamford Road advertised freshly baked bread for sale at six cents per loaf.<sup>140</sup> If the estimate in the *Straits Times* of Dr. Lim's income from his medical practice was correct, then it is possible that this income provided him with capital to invest in his many business activities.

Besides becoming one of the leading medical professionals in Singapore in his time, Dr. Lim also achieved considerable prominence within local business circles – especially in the first two decades of the twentieth century – as a founder or director of several enterprises in Singapore, including the United Saw Mills Limited, the Chinese Commercial Bank (established in 1912), the Ho Hong Bank (opened in 1917), and the Oversea-Chinese Bank Limited (founded in 1919);<sup>141</sup> moreover, he served as the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oversea-Chinese Bank.<sup>142</sup> These three banks

---

<sup>137</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 169; Victor Sim, p. 1; Carl A. Trocki, *Opium and Empire*, p. 148.

<sup>138</sup> Victor Sim, editor, *Biographies of Prominent Chinese in Singapore*, p. 1.

<sup>139</sup> *Straits Times*, 27 March 1897, p. 3, R0016457. See also Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 235.

<sup>140</sup> *Straits Times*, 25 June 1897, p. 2, R0016457, advertisement for The European Bakery, Stamford Road, M. Gorski, Proprietor.

<sup>141</sup> C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, pp. 71-72.

<sup>142</sup> The Hon. Dr. Lim Boon Keng, OBE, was described as the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oversea-Chinese Bank in: *The Singapore Free Press*, 14 September 1920, p. 6, R0006139.



eventually merged in 1932, to form the Oversea-Chinese Banking Corporation, better known today by its initials as the OCBC.<sup>143</sup>

Besides the banking industry, Dr. Lim's business interests also included rubber planting, the insurance industry, tin smelting, publishing, and the aerated water business. Dr. Lim invested in a rubber plantation in Malacca in mid-1890s, in partnership with Tan Chay Yan, and Dr. Lim also served at one time as a director of Singapore Rubber Limited. Dr. Lim and Tan Chay Yan were among the founders of the Sembawang Rubber Plantations, established in northern Singapore in 1898, and the two men also helped to establish the Eastern United Assurance Company by 1914; Tan served as the first Chairman of this company, while Dr. Lim served on its Advisory Board. In 1920, Dr. Lim helped establish another insurance company, the Overseas Assurance Corporation, and served as the first Chairman of this Corporation.<sup>144</sup> Meanwhile, Dr. Lim was interested in the tin smelting industry by the first years of the twentieth century –the Straits Trading Company, which operated the tin smelter on Pulau Brani, listed Dr. Lim as a shareholder in its Share Register List for 1901 to 1906.<sup>145</sup> He also served as the Chairman of the Straits Albion Press, Ltd., at Collyer Quay; this company was the proprietor of the *Malaya Tribune*.<sup>146</sup> In addition, Dr. Lim was the Chairman of the Board

---

<sup>143</sup> For the history of Chinese banks in Singapore in the first half of the twentieth century, see: Tan Ee Leong, "The Chinese Banks Incorporated in Singapore & The Federation of Malaya," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 26, Pt. 1, 1953, pp. 113-139.

<sup>144</sup> Regarding Dr. Lim Boon Keng's involvement in the rubber and insurance industries, see: Lee Kam Hing, "The Emergence of Modern Chinese Business in Malaya: The Case of the Straits Chinese and the Oversea-Chinese Banking Corporation," in: Leo Suryadinata, ed., *Ethnic Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia: A Dialogue between Tradition and Modernity*, pp. 230, 233, 235, and 236. Edwin Lee discusses Tan Chay Yan in *The British as Rulers*, p. 205. Lee Kam Hing states that the Eastern United Assurance Company was started in 1914 on p. 230, and in 1913 on p. 235. Regarding the Sembawang Rubber Plantations, see: Austin Coates, *The Commerce in Rubber*, pp. 119-120.

<sup>145</sup> K.G. Tregonning, *Straits Tin*, p. 26.

<sup>146</sup> *The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1914*, p. 219, R0011844.

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

of Directors of the Singapore Hot Springs, Limited, which was in the business of aerated and mineral waters.<sup>147</sup>

Dr. Lim's diverse business activities brought him into close contact with some of the leading Chinese businessmen in Singapore during the first half of the twentieth century. For example, in the 1919 edition of *The Singapore and Straits Directory*, Dr. Lim was listed as the Vice-Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Chinese Commercial Bank, of which Lee Choon Guan was the Chairman and Lim Nee Soon was one of the Directors; on the same page, Dr. Lim and Lee Choon Guan were also both listed as Directors of the Ho Hong Bank, of which Lim Peng Siang was the Chairman. Meanwhile, this *Directory* listed Lee Choon Guan as a Director of the Straits Steamship Company, and Lim Peng Siang as a Director of the Ho Hong Steamship Company. At the Straits Albion Press, Dr. Lim presided over a Board of Directors which included the Singapore businessman Ong Boon Tat, as well as Tan Cheng Lock of Malacca.<sup>148</sup> These few examples provide some idea of Dr. Lim's networking with the foremost local Chinese businessmen of that time. Lim Peng Siang, Lee Choon Guan, and Lim Nee Soon were all leading members of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce: Lim Peng Siang and Lim Nee Soon were Presidents of this Chamber at various times, and in 1921 the Chamber elected Ong Boon Tat to the Municipal Commission.<sup>149</sup>

In addition to his professional and business activities, Dr. Lim Boon Keng took a deep interest in the public good of Singapore, the British Empire, and China. In Singapore, he was involved in a wide variety of public activities and prestigious

---

<sup>147</sup> *The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1919*, p. 215, R0011847. George Peet recalled that the Singapore Hot Springs Company was unsuccessful; see: George Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, p. 177.

<sup>148</sup> *The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1919*, pp. 116, 120, 122, and 216B. Lim Boon Keng was listed as a Director of the Chinese Commercial Bank in *The Singapore and Malayan Directory for 1930*, p. 33.

<sup>149</sup> Lawrence G. Mani, *Fifty Eight Years of Enterprise*, pp. 89 and 99.

institutions. As a young man, he demonstrated an interest in the affairs of his city. In April 1896, Dr. Lim helped introduce a new death registration system for Singapore.<sup>150</sup> He served the public as a member of the Legislative Council from 1895 to 1903 and from 1915 to 1921, the Municipal Commission from 1905 to 1906, and the Chinese Advisory Board from 1913 to 1921.<sup>151</sup> While these colonial institutional settings brought him into contact with colonial officialdom, Dr. Lim was also involved with other prestigious institutions which provided him with opportunities to network with local Chinese elites. Dr. Lim was closely involved with the early history of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce, which was founded in 1906,<sup>152</sup> and he served as an intermediary between this Chamber and colonial officialdom.<sup>153</sup> He was also prominent in the world of elite Chinese social clubs in Singapore. Dr. Lim served as the Vice-President of the Weekly Entertainment Club at Ann Siang Hill in 1900,<sup>154</sup> and he was the first President of the Garden Club, a prestigious Chinese social club in Cairnhill Road, which was founded in 1916.<sup>155</sup> The variety of the institutions of which Dr. Lim Boon Keng was a member indicates that he had opportunities to network with the China-born Chinese business elite, as well as with Straits Chinese and European elites; clearly, this suggests that it would be incorrect to attempt to describe him as belonging to an exclusively Westernised or Anglicised social category.

Dr. Lim took a close interest in the transmission of knowledge within Singapore through both the press and the educational institutions, in the Chinese language as well as

---

<sup>150</sup> *Singapore Free Press*, 31 December 1896, p. 2, R0006048.

<sup>151</sup> C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership*, p. 78, endnote 22, and p. 306, endnote 13.

<sup>152</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 389.

<sup>153</sup> Lawrence G. Mani, *Fifty Eight Years of Enterprise*, pp. 89 and 93.

<sup>154</sup> *Straits Times*, 5 June 1900, p. 3, R0016463.

<sup>155</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 534-535.

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

the English language. In 1898, he took control of the *Sing Po*, a Chinese-language Singapore newspaper, gave it the new name of *Jit Shin Pau*, and employed it to promote Confucianism; but this newspaper was not financially successful, and it ceased publication by 1903.<sup>156</sup> He also helped establish two important English-language periodicals in Singapore: the *Straits Chinese Magazine* in 1897,<sup>157</sup> and the *Malaya Tribune* in 1914;<sup>158</sup> he was particularly involved with the *Straits Chinese Magazine*, as a co-editor and contributor. Meanwhile, he was also actively involved in local education, as one of the founders of the Singapore Chinese Girls' School in 1899, and as a pioneer in the teaching of Mandarin in Singapore.<sup>159</sup> As a Legislative Councillor, Dr. Lim urged the colonial government to support higher education in Singapore – for example, by advocating the establishment of a college in Singapore in 1897,<sup>160</sup> and by supporting additional funding for the King Edward VII Medical School in 1918;<sup>161</sup> in addition, he served on the committee which advocated the establishment of a university to commemorate the centenary of the Settlement of Singapore in 1919.<sup>162</sup> He believed that the Chinese people could benefit from the British university tradition.<sup>163</sup>

Dr. Lim Boon Keng publicly demonstrated his loyalty to the British Empire and its monarchy in a number of ways. During the celebrations in Singapore of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897, the Honourable Lim Boon Keng (who was then a

---

<sup>156</sup> Chen Mong Hock, *The Early Chinese Newspapers of Singapore 1881-1912*, pp. 75-80.

<sup>157</sup> *Straits Times*, 31 March 1897, p. 3, R0016457.

<sup>158</sup> C.M. Turnbull, *Dateline Singapore*, p. 70.

<sup>159</sup> Yen Ching-Hwang, "Hokkien Immigrant Society and Modern Chinese Education in British Malaya, 1904-1941," in: Michael W. Charney et al., eds., *Chinese Migrants Abroad*, p. 130; see also Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, pp. 210 and 215; and (re SCGS) Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 235 and 305.

<sup>160</sup> *Straits Times* 31 March 1897, p. 3, R0016457. The *Straits Times* quoted the first issue of the *Straits Chinese Magazine*, which was dated March 1897; see NUS microfilm reel R0007265.

<sup>161</sup> *Malaya Tribune*, 12 November 1918, p. 4, R0005814.

<sup>162</sup> *Straits Times*, 7 February 1919 p. 10, R0016569.

<sup>163</sup> See the report of Dr. Lim's speech at the University of Hong Kong in *The Malaya Tribune*, 29 January 1919, p. 2, R0005815.

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

Legislative Councillor) presented addresses expressing the loyalty of the Chinese of Singapore to the Queen; he read one address in the Legislative Council Chamber and another in the Town Hall, and the texts of both addresses were published in the *Straits Times*.<sup>164</sup> He also suggested that the Queen's Diamond Jubilee could be celebrated by establishing a college in Singapore; he believed that the proposed college would serve as a fitting memorial of the Jubilee.<sup>165</sup> Three years later, Dr. Lim organised the contingent of Chinese British subjects who marched in a giant multiethnic lantern procession from the Padang to Government House on the night of 7<sup>th</sup> June 1900 in a patriotic celebration of the recent victory of British forces at Pretoria.<sup>166</sup> He played a key role in the establishment of the Straits Chinese British Association in Singapore in 1900; the primary objectives of this organisation included the promotion of the loyalty of its membership to the Empire and the Crown, as well as the protection of their rights as British subjects.<sup>167</sup> Dr. Lim helped found the Chinese Company of the Singapore Volunteer Infantry in 1901, and, as a sergeant in this company, he was among the contingent of Volunteers who went to London to represent the Crown Colony of the Straits Settlements at the coronation of King Edward VII in 1902.<sup>168</sup> When Prince Arthur of Connaught visited Singapore in 1906, Dr. Lim read an address to the Prince at Government House, expressing the loyalty of the Chinese British subjects of Singapore and Malaya to the King-Emperor.<sup>169</sup> During the First World War, Dr. Lim encouraged the Chinese to subscribe to war loans; moreover, he helped write a book entitled *Duty to*

---

<sup>164</sup> *Straits Times*, 23 June 1897, pp. 2 and 3, R0016457.

<sup>165</sup> *Straits Times* 31 March 1897, p. 3, R0016457. The *Straits Times* quoted the first issue of the *Straits Chinese Magazine*, dated March 1897; see NUS microfilm reel R0007265.

<sup>166</sup> *Straits Times*, 8 June 1900, p. 3, R0016463.

<sup>167</sup> *Straits Times*, 18 June 1900, p. 2; 19 June 1900, p. 2; and 21 June 1900, p. 2, R0016463; see also Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 319-320, and C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership*, pp. 52-61.

<sup>168</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 236 and 333.

<sup>169</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 386-387.

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

*the British Empire*, which promoted loyalty among the Straits Chinese,<sup>170</sup> and he served on the Committee of the Prince of Wales War Relief Fund in Singapore.<sup>171</sup> Dr. Lim's public services to the Empire were rewarded when King George V made him an Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, or OBE, in 1918.<sup>172</sup>

But, Dr. Lim Boon Keng was not only a British Empire patriot and a leader of the Chinese community in Singapore – especially the Straits Chinese community; he was a patriotic supporter of *China* as well. In addition to his prominent involvement in public life in Singapore, he also demonstrated his devotion to the interests of his ancestral homeland, and he clearly felt that the Chinese of Singapore should be concerned with developments in China. Dr. Lim promoted the study of the Mandarin language, Chinese literature, and Confucianism in Singapore, and he was interested in the reform movement in China in the last years of the Ch'ing Dynasty.<sup>173</sup> In line with the reformist and modernising spirit, Dr. Lim advocated the cutting of tauchangs or queues in the 1890s,<sup>174</sup> and took a leading part in the movement against opium smoking in Singapore in the early twentieth century.<sup>175</sup> He went to Shanghai in 1908 as a representative of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce at an international conference, which considered issues relating to doing business in China.<sup>176</sup> He helped establish the Singapore branch of the Kuomintang in 1912, and served as one of the Presidents of this organisation.<sup>177</sup> Dr. Lim

---

<sup>170</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 237-238 and 532-533.

<sup>171</sup> *The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1919*, p. 113, R0011847.

<sup>172</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 238; see also: *Singapore Free Press*, May 21, 1919, p. 7.

<sup>173</sup> Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, pp. 209-214, and 218; see also Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 235-236.

<sup>174</sup> Chen Mong Hock, *The Early Chinese Newspapers of Singapore*, pp. 44, 78, and 122.

<sup>175</sup> Carl A. Trocki, *Opium and Empire: Chinese Society in Colonial Singapore, 1800-1910*, p. 210. See also J.A.B. Cook, *Sunny Singapore*, p. 142, and Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 434.

<sup>176</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 204-205.

<sup>177</sup> Png Poh Seng, "The Kuomintang in Malaya, 1912-1941," in: *Journal of Southeast Asian History*. Volume 2, Number 1 (March 1961), p. 9; R.B. McKenna, "Sir Laurence Guillemard and Political Control

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

also became the personal physician and secretary of Dr. Sun Yat-sen in 1912.<sup>178</sup> In 1921, Dr. Lim became the first President of Amoy (or Xiamen) University in China,<sup>179</sup> and he held that office for sixteen years.<sup>180</sup>

The remarkable career of Dr. Lim Boon Keng provides an outstanding example of a Straits Chinese leader who not only made his mark in the professional and business realms of the private sector, but also devoted a great deal of time and energy to public service in the overlapping public spheres of Singapore, the Empire, and China.<sup>181</sup> Lee Kam Hing's review of Dr. Lim's prominent role in local business history suggests that this aspect of his career deserves as much attention as his work as a social reformer.<sup>182</sup> While the record of Dr. Lim's outstanding career and achievements is, of course, an exceptional case, it nevertheless demonstrates how Chinese individuals could balance their successful careers in business or the professions, with their active involvement in public-spirited endeavours. Dr. Lim's remarkable life demonstrated that an English-educated Straits-born Chinese could become prominently involved in the concerns and institutional settings associated with the Chinese-educated Chinese immigrant community in Singapore; this suggests that labels such as *Westernised* and *Anglicised* should be treated with caution, since actual human beings of the past (as well as the present) were

---

of the Chinese in Singapore, 1920-1927," in: *Journal of the South Seas Society*, Volume 49 (1994), pp. 11 and 13; and: Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, p. 229.

<sup>178</sup> Victor Sim, editor, *Biographies of Prominent Chinese in Singapore*, p. 1.

<sup>179</sup> Wang Gungwu, "Lu Xun, Lim Boon Keng and Confucianism," in Wang Gungwu, *China and the Chinese Overseas*, pp. 147-165.

<sup>180</sup> Victor Sim, editor, *Biographies of Prominent Chinese in Singapore*, p. 1.

<sup>181</sup> See C.M. Turnbull's discussion of Lim Boon Keng's *triple loyalty* in *A History of Singapore*, p. 103.

<sup>182</sup> Lee Kam Hing, "The Emergence," in Suryadinata, *Ethnic Chinese*, pp. 229-230.

and are multifaceted, and they may not always fit neatly or exclusively into such discrete cultural and social categories.<sup>183</sup>

This caution should also be applied to the label of *China-centred* which might be applied to non-Westernised China-born Chinese in colonial Singapore just as quickly as the labels *Westernised* and *Anglicised* are applied to the Straits-born Chinese. In fact, as the case of Lim Boon Keng demonstrates, it was possible for a Straits-born Chinese to be Western-educated, English-speaking, and apparently prominent and comfortable in Western social and cultural settings, yet also to be closely interested in developments in China.

Cultural developments among Chinese elites which might at first glance appear to have been examples of Westernisation, may in fact have been part of the phenomenon of Chinese modernisation. The selective adaptation of certain elements of modern Western culture by elite Chinese individuals, whether in their personal lifestyles or in their businesses and other organisations, in the late nineteenth century and the first few decades of the twentieth century, should be viewed within the historical context of the reform movement in China. This era of reform began in the last years of the Ch'ing Dynasty and continued on into the republican era following the overthrow of the Manchus in 1911. It was an era personified by Sun Yat-sen, a Chinese nationalist who combined Chinese patriotism with an advocacy for modernisation and selective borrowing and adaptation from the West for the good of China.

In the early twentieth century, Chinese people developed a modern Chinese identity characterised by a synthesis of East and West through the adoption of certain

---

<sup>183</sup> See: Maurice Freedman, "The Growth of a Plural Society in Malaya," in: Immanuel Wallerstein, editor, *Social Change: The Colonial Situation*, pp. 284-285.



*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

modern Western ideas. According to this new, modern view of Chinese identity, the adoption of selected ideas from the West by Chinese people did not mean that they were becoming Westernised, or that they were rejecting or selling-out their Chinese identity. For example, Chinese who adopted Western clothing and hairstyles before the revolution in 1911 might have been accused by other Chinese of rejecting their Chinese culture and identity; but after 1911, Chinese could combine Western attire and hairstyles with Chinese patriotism. Thus, it would be incorrect to assume that the Chinese elites in Singapore in the early decades of the twentieth century who adopted selected aspects of Western or modern culture were necessarily thereby Westernised or Anglicised; on the contrary, they were faithful to the prevailing modern Chinese reformist spirit.

When Chinese and other Asian elites selected and adopted certain outward aspects of Western culture, this did not necessarily mean that they became Westernised or Anglicised – this description is too simplistic. Instead, such cultural borrowing could take the form of a more complicated phenomenon of cultural layering, with a superficial layer of Western cultural elements superimposed upon a deeper Asian substratum.<sup>184</sup> The adoption by Asians of certain cultural elements associated with the West – such as clothing, food, sports, architecture, language, and religion – may lead to these Asians being described as Westernised, but this seemingly obvious description is not necessarily appropriate and may actually be simplistic or even completely inaccurate and misleading. Adopted cultural elements may be successfully assimilated over time, and no longer be thought of as foreign imports. Thus, Buddhism is now familiar to Chinese culture, and

---

<sup>184</sup> Regarding cultural layering, see: Linda Colley, *Britons*, p. 163; see also the mention of selective cultural borrowing on p. 166. See also: Maurice Freedman, “The Growth of a Plural Society in Malaya,” in: Immanuel Wallerstein, editor, *Social Change: The Colonial Situation*, pp. 284-285.

### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

Christianity is familiar to European culture, though both religions were assimilated from other cultures.

As the people of one culture adopt elements of another culture, such beliefs, tastes, values, and practices may take on a life of their own, apart from their original cultural contexts. Consider, for example, the case of coffee, a beverage which is now a familiar element of Western culture. Europeans acquired their taste for drinking coffee from the Turks, who acquired it from Arabs; and the English word *coffee* is of Arabic origin, by way of Turkish. The drinking of coffee has become a part of the culture and daily life of millions of Westerners – yet, these Westerners who savour coffee are not described today as being thereby Ottomanised or Arabianised. Likewise, Europeans acquired the lethal taste for smoking tobacco from contact with American Indian peoples, and the words *cigar* and *cigarette* may be the descendants of a Mayan word for tobacco. Yet today, Westerners who smoke cigars and cigarettes are not regarded as being thereby Amerindianised. Coffee and cigarettes have become elements of Western culture, and are likely viewed as such by Asians today, or else simply part of the global consumer culture. An historical perspective on cultural diffusion and assimilation reveals that cultural imports which are at first regarded as foreign or exotic can lose these connotations over time – and this is as true with regard to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as it was for the earlier eras when Buddhism entered Chinese culture, when Christianity entered European culture, or when Europeans started drinking coffee and smoking tobacco.

First impressions of cultural developments may be superficial or misleading, and what is seemingly obvious may actually conceal the truth. What may seem at first to be

### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

Western may actually be Asian, just as what may seem at first glance to be modern may actually be traditional, and vice versa. For example, when King George V decided in 1932 to begin making Christmas radio broadcasts to the Empire,<sup>185</sup> this development was both modern and future-oriented – in the sense that it involved new communications technology – and yet also tradition-oriented, in that it served to help focus the attention of people throughout the Empire upon the monarchy, an institution built upon a sense of continuity with the past, by allowing radio listeners to hear the voice of this elderly king who came of age during the reign of Queen Victoria. King George V also made a radio broadcast to the Empire on the occasion of his Silver Jubilee in 1935; this broadcast was heard by radio listeners in Singapore.<sup>186</sup> Although modern technology was employed in these royal radio addresses, this should not obscure the essentially traditional nature of these broadcasts, which emphasised stability and continuity with the past. Likewise, when Chinese in Singapore adopted elements of Western culture in the early decades of the twentieth century, such as Western clothing, sports, and so forth, this development was not only about Westernisation, but was also at least as much about Chinese in Singapore keeping up with modern developments in China; it may have been more about Chinese-style modernisation than it was about Westernisation.

Outward appearances of Westernisation can be deceiving. The Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the various Chinese banks established in Singapore in the early decades of the twentieth century may have had outwardly Western forms, yet, in reality, they were substantially Chinese in cultural terms, with the Chamber representing traditional *pang* leadership structures and the banks organised along the

---

<sup>185</sup> Andrew Porter, “Empires in the Mind,” in: P.J. Marshall, ed., *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Empire*, p. 215.

<sup>186</sup> *Malaya Tribune* 7 May 1935, p. 11; *Straits Times* 9 May 1935, p. 5.

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

patrimonial lines of traditional Chinese family businesses. Similarly, the modern Chinese schools established in Singapore in the first half of the twentieth century may have outwardly appeared to be Western-style educational institutions; yet they actually functioned to promote and strengthen a sense of Chinese identity among their Singapore-born Chinese students.<sup>187</sup> As the Chinese people of Singapore became more oriented towards developments in Republican China – whether in terms of the development of Mandarin-medium local schools here, the interest in China’s political and national security issues, or the following of the latest clothing fashions from 1930s Shanghai – they may thereby have become more *Chinese* in terms of how they saw themselves, as opposed to Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hainanese, or Hakka. Thus, modernisation among the Chinese in Singapore may have actually made them more *Chinese*, rather than Westernising or Anglicising them.

Of course, none of these observations rule out the conclusion that some actual cultural Westernisation took place among the Chinese in colonial Singapore. However, these observations do suggest that the label of Westernisation must be applied cautiously, and that there may indeed have been much less Westernisation going on than would perhaps have appeared to be the case at first glance. Thus, Asian elites in colonial Singapore who adopted elements of Western culture were, nevertheless, *not* necessarily Westernised or Anglicised; it was entirely possible for Asian elites to assimilate certain aspects of Western culture on one level, and yet remain entirely true on a deeper level to the substance of their own Asian cultural backgrounds.

---

<sup>187</sup> See: Wee Tong Bao, “Chinese Education in Prewar Singapore: A Preliminary Analysis of Factors Affecting the Development of Chinese Vernacular Schools,” In: Michael W. Charney, et al., eds., *Chinese Migrants Abroad*, p. 109.

## *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

A consideration of the cultural identities of certain prominent individuals underlines the fact that it is problematic to compartmentalise people in cultural categories, either as individuals or as groups.<sup>188</sup> In particular, it is not so easy as it might seem at first glance to simplistically dichotomise the Chinese population of colonial Singapore into Straits-born and China-born categories – that is, to distinguish clearly between Westernised Straits Chinese who spoke English or Baba Malay and whose loyalty was to the British Empire, versus Chinese immigrants who spoke Chinese dialects and were emotionally tied to China. For example, the case of Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa shows that the boundaries between these groups may have overlapped considerably. Whampoa was born in China *circa* 1816 and immigrated to Singapore in 1830, yet he became fluent in English and was very comfortable socialising with European elites, whom he invited to social functions at his country home in Serangoon.<sup>189</sup> He became quite popular with European elites, served as a Trustee of Raffles Institution,<sup>190</sup> and was honoured by the European establishment by being appointed the first Chinese member of the Legislative Council in 1869, and by being made a Companion of the Order of St. Michael and St. George, or CMG, by Queen Victoria in 1876.<sup>191</sup> In 1869, the *Daily Times* described Whampoa as being nearly as English as he was Chinese.<sup>192</sup> At the same time, he retained a strong feeling for his ancestral culture, as illustrated by the story of

---

<sup>188</sup> See: John M. Carroll, *Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong*, p. viii.

<sup>189</sup> *Straits Times*, 3 April 1880, p. 1, R0016427; Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 51-56; and: John Turnbull Thomson, *Some Glimpses into Life in the Far East* (1864), pp. 307-311.

<sup>190</sup> *Straits Times*, 20 November 1869, p. 1, R0016422.

<sup>191</sup> *Straits Times*, 13 May 1876, pp. 1-2, R0016425.

<sup>192</sup> *Daily Times*, quoted by Sir Ong Siang Song, in: *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 157.

## *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

how he sent his son to China to re-grow his queue,<sup>193</sup> as well as by the fact that, when he died, his remains were sent back to China.<sup>194</sup>

Similarly, the case of Dr. Lim Boon Keng also shows that real people often did not fit neatly into conceptual boxes or compartments of cultural identity. Dr. Lim Boon Keng was a Straits Chinese who was born in Singapore<sup>195</sup> in 1869, yet he was devoted to the modernisation of China, and in 1921 he became the President of Amoy University, which was founded by Tan Kah Kee.<sup>196</sup> He combined in himself several identities: Scottish-educated medical doctor, successful local businessmen and banker, Straits Chinese civic leader, vocal supporter of the British Empire, promoter of Chinese education and Confucianism in Singapore, founder of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce,<sup>197</sup> and the president of a Chinese university. It seems that he was respected by the China-born and Straits Chinese alike, as well as by European elites, and enjoyed good social connections in a variety of social circles. Though he was a Straits Chinese, he was certainly not socially isolated or compartmentalised within that category.

The examples of Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa and Lim Boon Keng, as well as other prominent Chinese, such as Tan Sri Lee Kong Chian, Yap Pheng Geck, and George Lien Ying Chow, illustrate the fact that the China-born and Straits Chinese sections of the Chinese population in colonial Singapore were, perhaps, not so distinct from one another

---

<sup>193</sup> The anecdote about Whampoa's son is found in Whampoa's obituary in the *Straits Times* and in Sir Cecil Clementi Smith's letter to the Colonial Office dated 3 December 1896, quoted in: Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, pp. 188-189, as well as in Admiral Keppel's autobiography, *A Sailor's Life under Four Sovereigns*, quoted by Sir Ong Siang Song in *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 54: Admiral Keppel noted that Whampoa's son cut off his queue and converted to Presbyterianism while in Britain. Compare with: J.D. Vaughan, *The Manners and Customs*, p. 4.

<sup>194</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 55.

<sup>195</sup> A. Wright and H.A. Cartwright, editors, *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya* (1908), p. 633.

<sup>196</sup> Wang Gungwu, "Lu Xun, Lim Boon Keng and Confucianism," in: Wang Gungwu, *China and the Chinese Overseas*, p. 147.

<sup>197</sup> See the photo and its caption, in: Wright and Cartwright, *Twentieth Century Impressions*, p. 616.

### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

as their labels may imply. In other words, history books may retrospectively compartmentalise these people more than they were actually socially compartmentalised during the colonial era. A consideration of the public lives and interests of these men may contribute to an appreciation of the need to avoid simplistically categorising the Chinese population here.

Tan Sri Dr. Lee Kong Chian was born in Fu Yong Village, Nan Ann District, Fukien Province, in 1893 or 1894, and in 1903 he immigrated to Singapore, where he learned English. After returning to China for further studies, he settled in Singapore in 1915, where he worked as a teacher in two Chinese schools here – the Tao Nan School and the Chong Cheng School – and also worked as a translator for the local Chinese-language newspaper *Lat Pau*, and as a surveyor for the Singapore Municipality. In 1916 he went to work in Tan Kah Kee's rubber business, and four years later he married Tan's elder daughter, Nee Ai Leh. Lee bought a rubber plantation in 1922, and in 1927, he established the Lee Smoke House in Muar, Johore; this business became the Lee Rubber Company in 1928. This company grew steadily under his management, and eventually controlled rubber plantations covering over eighteen thousand acres. By 1950, Lee provided one-quarter of the rubber supply of the Goodyear company in America. Lee also entered the pineapple, saw-milling, coconut oil, and biscuit-making businesses, as well as banking. In 1932, he helped establish the Oversea-Chinese Banking Corporation, or OCBC, and served as the Chairman of the OCBC from 1937 to 1964. He was the President of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce from 1939 to 1940 and from 1946 to 1947. Meanwhile, like so many leading Chinese businessmen, he devoted much of his wealth to philanthropy. He supported Chinese schools in Singapore and in China,

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

and raised funds to help his homeland when the Japanese invaded China in the 1930s. He also assisted Malay, Tamil, and English-language education in Singapore. In 1952, he established the Lee Foundation, a charitable organisation which is renowned for its generosity, especially towards education in Singapore; he donated ten million dollars to his Foundation before his death in 1967. He demonstrated his filial piety by honouring the memory of his father, Lee Kuo Chuan, also known as Lee Kok Chuan, with the establishment of the Kuo Chuan Primary School in Nan Ann District, Fukien, China, the Kok Chuan Village in Singapore, and the Kuo Chuan Library at the Singapore Chinese High School.

Yet, in addition to all of Tan Sri Lee Kong Chian's business and social accomplishments which might be seen to represent the ideal of a Chinese immigrant businessman, with the typical characteristics of a highly successful China-born towkay taken to their fullest expression, he did not merely follow traditional Chinese ways. Instead, perhaps it might be said that he developed a modern and cosmopolitan type of Chinese identity. Tan Sri Lee also introduced modern methods into his business, and cultivated close connections with Europeans, especially the colonial authorities. While he served as the Chairman of the Singapore Chinese High School from 1931 to 1956, supported Amoy University and Chip Bee Normal School in China, and donated a fortune to Nanyang University after the war, he also served as the first Chancellor of the English-medium University of Singapore, from 1962 to 1965. He was evidently comfortable in both Chinese-language and English-language settings, reflecting the fact that he was educated both in Chinese in China, and in English in Singapore; indeed, while he was in the United States during the Japanese occupation of Singapore, he



### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

lectured Americans at Columbia University – the American authorities apparently respected him for his wealth of knowledge. His fluency in the English language and his embracing of modern, Western business methods, as well as his connections with Europeans, seem to have been important factors in his success as a leading businessman and a renowned public benefactor, along with his traditional Chinese values and his connections with Chinese businessmen. This remarkable man successfully combined the attributes of a China-born Chinese businessmen (including devotion to China and to Chinese education in China and in the Nanyang, and a belief in treating his workers with fatherly care) with other characteristics which might normally be more likely associated with the image of an English-educated Straits Chinese businessman – such as his English-language ability and his connections with Europeans.<sup>198</sup> (This might be regarded as an example of stereotyping – but, sometimes, in order to critique a stereotype, it may be necessary to first define the stereotype!).

Yap Pheng Geck was technically not a Straits Chinese, since he was not a native of the Straits Settlements – he was born in 1901 in a Chinese settlement called Wah Peng Kang in Johore, the son of a Chinese immigrant – yet he was associated with three of the most important institutions of the Straits Chinese. He was educated at the Anglo-Chinese School in Singapore, an English-medium school which was closely identified with the Straits Chinese elite of Singapore. He held leadership positions within the Straits

---

<sup>198</sup> “Obituary: Tan Sri Dr. Lee Kong Chian,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Researches*, Volume 3, December 1967, pp. 2-5; James A. Michener, *The Voice of Asia*. New York: Random House, 1951, pp. 142-145, also in: James A. Michener, *Voices of Asia*, pp. 127-130; B.R. Screenivasan, “The Late Dato Lee Kong Chian – An Appreciation,” *Journal of the South Seas Society*, Volume XXII, Parts 1 & 2, 1967, published in 1969, pp. 19-20; Victor Sim, editor, *Biographies of Prominent Chinese in Singapore*, p. 5; Lawrence G. Mani, editor, *Fifty Eight Years of Enterprise*, pp. 111 and 117; Jamie Mackie, “Chinese Entrepreneurs in Malaysia,” in: Leo Suryadinata, editor, *Ethnic Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia*, pp. 175-194, especially pp. 185-193; Chan Kwok Bun and Claire Chiang See Ngoh, *Stepping Out*, pp. 275, 297, 327, 334, and 336; and: Sikko Visscher, “Business, Ethnicity and State” (Ph.D. Thesis, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2002), especially pp. 72-73.

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

Chinese community, as a prominent member of the Straits Chinese British Association and a Captain and Commanding Officer of the Chinese Company of the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force. Both of these organisations were traditionally led by the Straits Chinese elites, and especially the pro-Empire King's Chinese. In 1939, the Straits Chinese British Association nominated Yap Pheng Geck to serve as a Singapore Municipal Commissioner. Yap Pheng Geck proved his loyalty to his adopted city and to the Empire by serving as a Captain with the Volunteers at the time of the Japanese invasion and conquest of Singapore in 1942, and was taken prisoner by the Japanese, while other elites from Singapore and Malaya managed to escape by fleeing the island and spending the occupation years in India or elsewhere.<sup>199</sup> The point here is not to criticise those who quite understandably chose to escape the Japanese invaders, but rather to note that Yap Pheng Geck voluntarily *chose* to remain and courageously face the onslaught of the invading Japanese, knowing that the Japanese had already perpetrated atrocities on the people of occupied China.

After the war, Yap Pheng Geck served again on the Municipal Commission, became a Justice of the Peace in 1947, and served as the Chairman of the Straits Chinese British Association and the President of the Singapore Rotary Club. He was honoured with an MBE in 1952, which indicates how much he was respected by colonial officialdom. On the other hand, Yap Pheng Geck was also closely connected with the interests and organisations of the China-born population of Singapore. He was very prominent in the world of Chinese banks in Singapore, serving as the Secretary of the Chinese Commercial Bank and, later, the Oversea-Chinese Banking Corporation (or

---

<sup>199</sup> K.G. Tregonning pointed out that hundreds of Malaysians spent the occupation years in Bangalore, India – see: Tregonning, “Tan Cheng Lock: A Malayan Nationalist.” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Volume X, Number 1 (March 1979), p. 48.

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

OCBC), as well as the Manager of the Sze Hai Tong Banking & Insurance Company. He was elected to the Committee of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce in 1946, and served as Vice-President of this Chamber from 1958 to 1965. In the 1950s, he helped Tan Lark Sye, the leader of the Singapore Hokkien Huay Kuan, to establish the Nanyang University, or Nantah. Though neither a Straits-Chinese nor a China-born immigrant, Yap Pheng Geck was evidently accepted and well-respected in elite circles within both categories of the Chinese population.<sup>200</sup>

George Lien Ying Chow was born in China, in Taipo (or Dapu) village, in Teoyeoh (or Chaoyang), Teochew (or Chaozhou) County, Guangdong Province, in 1906, and received a few years of schooling there in the Teochew dialect before his parents passed away and he had to go to work to support himself. After he immigrated to Singapore in 1920 at the age of fourteen, he learned English from tutors, and worked closely with Europeans here; his company provided food and beverages to the British military, and he was appointed a Municipal Commissioner. Meanwhile, he became the youngest President of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce at the age of 34 in 1941. He escaped the Japanese in 1942 by shipping out of Singapore with a fortune in diamonds stashed in his underwear, and returned to Singapore after the war to establish the Overseas Union Bank. In 1946, he ceremonially welcomed Governor Sir Franklin Gimson on behalf of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce. He was appointed once again to the Municipal Commission, and in 1952 he became the chairman of the Ngee Ann Kongsi, a Teochew organisation. He helped establish Nanyang University in

---

<sup>200</sup> Yap Pheng Geck, *Scholar, Banker, Gentleman Soldier*; Victor Sim, editor, *Biographies of Prominent Chinese in Singapore* (1950) p. 23; and: Sikko Visscher, "Business, Ethnicity and State: The Representational Relationship of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the State, 1945-1997." Ph.D. Thesis, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2002, pp. 75, 348, and 352.

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

the 1950s, and was a founder of Ngee Ann College (which was later renamed Ngee Ann Polytechnic), which was opened in 1963. He also helped support Chinese schools, including the Tuan Mong School, the Ngee Ann School, the Ngee Ann Girl's School, Nanyang High School, and the Chinese High School. George Lien Ying Chow was a Chinese immigrant who was active in the types of organisations associated with China-born local leaders, yet he also worked closely with Europeans, cultivating profitable business connections with the British military, and building close contacts with colonial officialdom in the Municipal Commission.<sup>201</sup>

The fact that some leaders of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce in the early and middle decades of the twentieth century were English-speaking, such as Dr. Lim Boon Keng, Tan Sri Lee Kong Chian, Yap Pheng Geck, and George Lien Ying Chow, is significant in view of the fact that many Chinese business elites at this time did not speak English. C.F. Yong has noted that, even in the early decades of the twentieth century, most of the China-born businessmen who led the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce at that time could not communicate in the English language.<sup>202</sup> Dr. Lim Boon Keng, Tan Sri Lee Kong Chian, Yap Pheng Geck, and George Lien Ying Chow were leaders in the realm of Chinese business who transcended the language barrier, and whose success in making social connections suggests that the boundary of cultural identity between Straits Chinese and China-born Chinese was certainly not an impermeable barrier.

---

<sup>201</sup> Lien Ying Chow with Louis Kraar, *From Chinese Villager to Singapore Tycoon: My Life Story*; Victor Sim, editor, *Biographies of Prominent Chinese in Singapore* (1950), p. 12; and: Sikko Visscher, "Business, Ethnicity and State: The Representational Relationship of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the State, 1945-1997." Ph.D. Thesis, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2002, p. 63 and 65-67, 70, and 72.

<sup>202</sup> C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, pp. 62, 64-65, 66, 73, 74, and 87.

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

Another example of a Chinese immigrant who did not conform to the stereotypical image of a China-born businessman or labourer was N.I. Low. He was born in China *circa* 1900 (he was unsure of the year), in a small village in Ming-tsing County, Fukien Province, where his family lived in poverty, subsisting on a meagre diet of vegetables and unpolished rice, some snails and field-mice, but very rarely any meat, poultry, or eggs; they ate pork only during festivals. His early childhood experiences might have suggested that he would likely follow the way of life typical of millions of Chinese peasants since ancient times; but instead, his life course soon took him in a very different direction. After immigrating to Singapore, Low was educated in the English language. He developed a special interest in the English language, and in 1923 he became a teacher at the prestigious Raffles Institution, a school which has educated so many of the Chinese and other Asian elites of Singapore over the years. This former Chinese peasant child eventually specialised in teaching the English language and English literature – a career path which might not be associated with the stereotypical or essentialised image of a Chinese immigrant, and one which would certainly not have been expected for a poor peasant boy from Fukien. N.I. Low taught at Raffles Institution until 1938. The colonial authorities appointed him to the post of Headmaster of the Geylang English School in 1939, and subsequently promoted him to the rank of Assistant Director of Education in the colonial administration shortly before the Japanese conquered Singapore. While still in his early forties, he had already accomplished the transition from a peasant in China to a high-ranking official in the colonial educational system in Singapore. His career defies the familiar compartmentalisation of Chinese in

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

Singapore into either the category of Chinese-educated and China-oriented Chinese immigrants, or the category of English-educated Straits-born King's Chinese.<sup>203</sup>

Individuals who were not, strictly speaking, Straits Chinese, could still adopt some of the characteristics of the Straits Chinese category, and even (as shown in the case of Yap Pheng Geck) be accepted by the Straits Chinese into associational and leadership roles which were normally associated with Straits Chinese people. The categories of Straits Chinese and China-born Chinese, as cultural labels and social divisions, should thus, perhaps, be regarded as somewhat problematic and artificial constructs and invented traditions in social structures, identities, and historiography (much like nations, for that matter), rather than as some kind of natural divisions among the Chinese population here. These labels may have some use as generalisations to help provide a simplified overview of society, but they should be applied with caution. Anyone who wishes to write about the colonial era should not treat these categories as if they were self-evident features of the social landscape, existing somehow in isolation from one another, with their own separate histories. Any attempt to describe clear-cut categories of Straits Chinese and China-born Chinese may be more about reification than description. Pierre Bourdieu explained that sociologists can influence the way people see their societies by describing social divisions;<sup>204</sup> the same might be said of historians who describe divisions within the societies of the past.

Of course, it would be possible to write accounts of Straits Chinese and China-born Chinese that attempt to make the cultural divisions between these groups seem clear

---

<sup>203</sup> Low Ngiong Ing, *Recollections: Chinese Jetsam on a Tropic Shore When Singapore was Syonan-to*.

<sup>204</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, pp. 53-55; "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups," p. 723; see also: "What Makes a Social Class? On The Theoretical and Practical Existence Of Groups," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology: A Critical Review*, Volume XXXII, 1987, p. 2.

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

and natural by highlighting and essentialising the different stereotypical concerns, interests, and characteristics of each category. But, as the examples of the men discussed above show, it is also possible to show how the interests and concerns of Straits-born and China-born men overlapped and coincided, and how they did not simply conform to essentialised and stereotyped images. While there was a great degree of variation in cultural characteristics and individual personalities, and while the Chinese population was culturally plural, Straits Chinese and China-born Chinese elites alike routinely interacted with their other Asian elite counterparts and the leading Europeans. They all cooperated together in the mutual enhancement of their prestige through the creation and exchange of symbolic capital in the organisations and rituals at the institutional centre of the colonial society. The social connections which linked these leading Asians and Europeans together as members of the cosmopolitan elite class were at least as socially real as the cultural characteristics which divided the Chinese population here into the Straits Chinese and China-born Chinese categories, despite whatever tendencies there might be today to focus more on the cultural differences than the social connections.

An overemphasis on racial or cultural categories, labels, and distinctions may result in a tendency to overlook the connections between people of different backgrounds which linked, to some degree at least, the diverse population into one society. Within this society of overlapping cultural identities, a given individual might belong to more than one category at a time – being, perhaps, like Dr. Lim Boon Keng, simultaneously a Straits Chinese, a King's Chinese, a Chinese patriot, a Singaporean, a modernist, and a Confucianist, as well as a member of the multiracial community of prestige. The culturally diverse society of colonial Singapore was not so much a collection of discrete

compartments, or a plural society in the Furnivallian sense, but rather a more complicated picture of overlapping identities which provided the background for the patterns of social interactions overarching cultural differences – the patterns of social interactions with which this study is concerned. These patterns of social interactions connected people who were separated from one another by cultural distinctions. Social processes in the realm of prestige reduced the social distance between elites of different cultures and associated them together in the same social space at the centre of colonial society. The cosmopolitan elite class here was a community of *prestige*, rather than a community of *culture*.

### **Concluding Remarks**

A cultural explanation for the cohesion of this elite class is simply not plausible, in view of the cultural divisions which persisted between different ethnic groups of Asian and European elites in colonial Singapore. The Asian and European elites of colonial Singapore shared certain values, whether these elites were in government, in business, or in the professions – or in all three, as was Dr. Lim Boon Keng. They shared the cultural values associated with devotion to duty, honour, and public service, as well as an appreciation of the importance of the social reality of symbolic capital in the public sphere – the only sphere in which prestige (and, hence, elite status itself) could exist. These cultural affinities provided elites from the East and the West with points of common interest and understanding, especially in the social sphere of public leadership, honour, and prestige, which could potentially aid them in social interaction and cooperation as fellow members of the cosmopolitan elite class.



### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

However, despite important common interests, Asian and European elites certainly did not unite into a single cultural identity in colonial Singapore – they did not form a new Singaporean identity in the style of a homogenised cultural melting pot, nor did all Asian elites fully assimilate European culture and become Westernised. Social divisions and different identities persisted even among the British population of colonial Singapore – a category of people who shared certain cultural characteristics associated with British people, including the English language, tastes in food, styles of clothing, interest in certain sports, and so on. Yet, despite these cultural connections, even this population was socially divided – not only along the lines of horizontal social divisions between people of different ranks, but also in terms of vertical social divisions between Britons identified with different economic sectors and geographical locales, such as the government officials of Empress Place, the businessmen and professionals of Raffles Place and Collyer Quay, the tradesmen who were employed by the department stores (namely John Little's, Robinson's, and Whiteaway's), the engineers and other staff of the Singapore Harbour Board at Keppel Harbour, and armed services personnel in their barracks. In other words, social divisions developed and persisted, even among people who shared the same basic culture. This highlights the importance *social* factors, rather than *cultural* factors, in contributing to class formation and cohesion by bridging cultural divisions.

The ethnically diverse and culturally plural society of colonial Singapore was quite different from the emerging nation-states of the nineteenth century. Though it might have been possible for the elite class of a nation-state to feel themselves united by sharing important cultural characteristics, including language and religion, this was

### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

simply impossible in colonial Singapore. While Protestantism could serve as an important unifying factor for elites in Britain<sup>205</sup> and the United States,<sup>206</sup> there was too much religious diversity in Singapore for the colonial elite class here to be unified in that way. For the elites here to integrate as a class, they had to resort to building social connections in spite of their cultural differences.

To understand how Asian and European elites were socially integrated as an elite class within the context of the cultural plurality and diversity of this colonial port city, it is necessary to turn from a consideration of the phenomena of limited cultural assimilation and convergence, to the phenomena involving the exchange or reciprocal conferment of symbolic capital, which were even more important to elite class integration. This exchange occurred within the framework of prestigious institutions, an organisational network which grew steadily over the course of the colonial era in terms of the number of institutions and the complexity of their integration. This organisational network provided the institutional context within which Asian and European elites interacted, formed social ties of acquaintanceships,<sup>207</sup> and integrated as an elite class as they cooperated in giving each other face.

---

<sup>205</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons*, pp. 18, 19, 23, 43, 53, 55, and 367-369.

<sup>206</sup> C. Wright Mills pointed out that most American elites were members of Protestant churches, particularly the Episcopal and Presbyterian churches. See: C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, p. 279; see also the references to religion among American elites on pp. 60, 65, 66, 106, 127-128, 180, 192, 249 (footnote), 280-282.

<sup>207</sup> Regarding the formation of acquaintanceships in organisational contexts, see: Mark S. Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties," in: *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 78, No. 6 (May 1973), p. 1375, and: "The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited," in: *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 1 (1983), p. 229. On the relationship between interaction and ties, see: Granovetter (1973), p. 1362; see also: Peter M. Blau, *Exchange and Power in Social Life*, pp. 4, 89, 92, and 107. Elites could form social ties amongst themselves that might be described as *acquaintanceships*, or what Mark Granovetter calls *weak ties*, without necessarily forming close friendships, or *strong ties*; C. Wright Mills pointed out that the unity of the American power elite was not based mainly on friendships, and that the elites did not need to personally know one another; see: C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, p. 287.

### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

Such cultural convergence as occurred among the Chinese and European elites here took place only *after* they had successfully integrated socially as a cosmopolitan elite class. Thus, while cultural convergence facilitated and reinforced the social unification of the elite class, cultural assimilation certainly did not bring about elite class integration; if anything, it was probably the other way around: the social integration of Asian and European elites likely led to much cultural appreciation, diffusion, and adaptation among them, and even to a certain degree of cultural assimilation between these elites. Cultural diffusion could occur through the social linkages of acquaintanceships which bridged cultural divisions.<sup>208</sup> The cultural convergence of these elites was probably more of a *result* of their social integration than a factor in *causing* such integration.

Elite class integration here was more about the bridging of cultural boundaries than about making those boundaries disappear – or at least fade – through cultural diffusion and assimilation. Asian and European elites overcame their cultural differences and integrated as a class by establishing social connections which were rich in symbolic capital. However, their cultural differences did not disappear; indeed, distinct ethnic identities persisted among these elites despite their social integration as a class. The story of Whampoa and his son shows how a leading Asian elite could treasure his ethnic identity while successfully establishing social connections with Europeans; Whampoa decided that his son should be educated in both Europe and China. In colonial Singapore, the elite class – like the general population – was simply far too ethnically diverse to ever be culturally homogenised and fused into a single cultural identity; but the elites, at least,

---

<sup>208</sup> See: Granovetter “The Strength of Weak Ties” (1983), pp. 215-216. See also: Granovetter (1973), pp. 1369 and 1370-1371.

### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

succeeded in making social connections which accommodated cultural differences. Thus, there was more *social* convergence among these elites than *cultural* convergence, and so an account of the development of the cosmopolitan elite class must be primarily a social history, rather than a cultural history.

In summary, having considered briefly the cultural history of Chinese and European elites in colonial Singapore, the overall sense is that elite cultural assimilation or convergence was insufficient to provide these with a shared cultural identity. In fact, the members of the elite class here were divided by cultural developments, at least as much as they were united by cultural convergence. Although the appreciation of the value of symbolic capital may be seen as a cultural common denominator of elites of all ethnic groups, this cultural characteristic was fully developed throughout the world long before the founding of the Settlement of Singapore; since immigrants brought this value with them, it cannot be considered a product of cultural developments, assimilation, or convergence in the historical context of this place. Therefore, the history of the integration of the cosmopolitan elite class in colonial Singapore must focus upon the social history of this class, rather than the cultural development of its Asian and European membership. The history of the elite class here as a socially integrated community belongs to the realm of social history more than to cultural history. However, this does not mean that the consideration of cultural developments is superfluous to an understanding of elite social integration; on the contrary, putting the cultural context in perspective serves to highlight the importance of social history in elite class integration in a multiracial colonial social setting.

### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

Cultural historians and social historians may share interests in some of the same topics, even as they ask different questions about different aspects of the experiences of people and peoples of the past. Cultural historians may be interested in the values, beliefs, and tastes of certain populations or sections of populations, and with the cultural products, the practices, artefacts, symbols, representations, myths, and traditions, which both express the nature of the values, beliefs and tastes that characterise a particular culture, and which also function to sustain and perpetuate a particular culture as a distinctive entity, shaping, reshaping, and reinventing the culture over time. Social historians are interested in the connections and interactions among the members of a population – the relationships of acquaintance, kinship, cooperation, subordination, allegiance, leadership, ascendancy, conformity, compliance, conflict, resistance, and domination, which link people together into associations, social groups, cohesive social classes, and societies, and which can also divide populations and separate groups by including and uniting certain individuals as insiders in fellowship, membership, and shared identity, while excluding others as outsiders. Moreover, cultural characteristics often function to rank people within a group or society, privileging some people and groups as being insiders to a greater degree than others, legitimating their ascendancy and centrality within their social context and, perhaps, inspiring the less privileged individuals to aspire to be accepted or honoured by these elites. A social historian may be very interested in cultural matters, in practices, representations, symbols, myths, and traditions, because these cultural products and artefacts shape social interactions and connections, by influencing public memories, collective perceptions, and social reality.

## *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

Cultural factors – the cultural accommodation and convergence among Asian and European elites in colonial Singapore – were not the primary means by which these elites united as a cohesive elite class. Although there was significant cultural accommodation among the Asian and European elites, they certainly did not blend together into a single homogenised cultural category or identity. The explanation for the cohesion and continuity of the multiracial elite class is not to be found in the realm of *cultural* developments; instead, *social* developments, processes, institutions and patterns of interactions allowed the Asian and European elites to build social bridges which transcended their cultural distinctions. While Asian and European elites were not united by a single shared culture or cultural convergence and assimilation in a general sense, they did have at least one cultural element in common – one point of cultural overlap or parallel. This was their shared interest in *symbolic capital* under such labels as prestige, reputation, face, *mien-tzu*, and *nama*.<sup>209</sup> Perhaps it might be argued that elites of any cultural background would not be elites if they did not care about their prestige. Is it even possible to imagine an elite individual of any race – a leading person in any sense – who really does not care at all about his reputation, as perceived either by the public or by certain people around him? How could a person be a leader in any sense without the respect of at least a fair number of his fellow citizens?<sup>210</sup> The fact that elites seem to be very much concerned about their public reputations, to the extent of going to a great deal

---

<sup>209</sup> Regarding honour and prestige, see: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, esp. Chapters 10, 11, 13, and 17, pp. 114-124, 143, and 175; see also: John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia*. Regarding *nama*, see: Anthony Milner, *Kerajaan: Malay Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule*, especially pp. xvi, 104, 105, and 106. Regarding *face* or *mien-tzu* (also spelled *mianzi*), see, for example: P. Christopher Earley, *Face, Harmony, and Social Structure: An Analysis of Organizational Behaviour across Cultures*.

<sup>210</sup> See: Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chapters 18, 19, and 21.

### *A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*

of trouble and devoting much time to the cultivation of their public images, and defending themselves robustly against any slanders.

This shared appreciation of prestige did not require cultural assimilation; Asians and Europeans brought this concern for reputation with them to Singapore from their various homelands. Their shared appreciation of symbolic capital was the basis for the cohesion of their class – a cohesion which was founded not upon any overall *cultural* commonality, but rather upon *social* connections which crossed the boundaries of culture and race. These social connections among the cosmopolitan elites involved their cooperation in gaining, affirming, and enhancing their symbolic capital in the context of a prestigious institutional setting and the social events which made up the elite social game<sup>211</sup> played in the scene of prestige here in colonial Singapore. The social capital or network of connections which gave cohesion to the multiracial elite class was based more on shared and exchanged symbolic capital than on shared cultural capital.

---

<sup>211</sup> Regarding the concept of a *social game*, see: E. Digby Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class*, pp. 11-12; Peter Burke, *The Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society in Italy*, p. 194; Norton E. Long, “The Local Community as an Ecology of Games.” *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (November 1958), p. 261; David Silverman, *The Theory of Organisations: A Sociological Framework*, pp. 210-212; and: Harvey Warren Zorbaugh, *The Gold Coast and the Slum: A Sociological Study of Chicago’s Near North Side*, pp. 49-64 and 279.

*A Cultural Explanation for Elite Integration?*



**Chapter Four:**

**The Cult of Raffles: Civil Religion and the Multiracial Elite Class in Colonial Singapore**

Asian and European elites in colonial Singapore were united in their community of prestige in part by their shared veneration and sanctification of the memory of Raffles, since the cult of Raffles was an important component within the system of status symbols, or the social mechanism of prestige, which integrated the multiracial elite class in colonial Singapore. This cult was centred on the commemoration of Sir Stamford Raffles, the Lieutenant-Governor of Fort Marlborough at Bencoolen, and Agent to the Governor-General of India, who established the Settlement of Singapore on behalf of the East India Company in 1819. Asian and European elites cooperated in the veneration of Sir Stamford Raffles as the iconic founding father of the Settlement, and contributed to the elaboration of his cult as a colonial civil religion, thereby endowing his name and image with prestigious and iconic status, and making his name into a label of prestige which could be attached to institutions and individuals. The cult of Raffles served as a prestige-enhancing and status-confirming social institution, which functioned as a social mechanism to foster the integration of elites into a multiracial class, to help attract and incorporate new generations of elites into the social structure, and to promote the continuity of this social structure and the ideologies which underpinned it.

The cult of Raffles involved the creation of a variety of Raffles-related symbols that were distinguished by the prestigious *Raffles* label, and were available for use by Asian and Western elites alike. These elites cooperated in pooling symbolic capital within the institution of the Raffles icon, confirming and enhancing their own individual

## *The Cult of Raffles*

prestige by associating themselves with his cult. Their veneration of Raffles and their participation together in the rituals of his cult promoted the social and symbolic integration of their elite class, giving them a sense of belonging together to a multiracial community of prestige.

Asian and European elites cultivated the prestige value of his name every time they wrote about him, mentioned him in speeches, named things after him, and celebrated his memory with spectacular public rituals. The name of Raffles became in the early years of the Settlement – and remained throughout the colonial era – an important form of the currency of distinction which linked Asian and European elites together through symbolic exchange and communion, as they celebrated his memory in social gatherings, ceremonies, and publications, and by naming institutions and places after him. Their shared partaking of symbolic capital connected with the *Raffles* label helped to identify them to one another and to the general public as recognised elites who belonged (together) to the same social space at the centre of the colonial society, as fellow members of the cosmopolitan community of prestige – for example, as fellow alumni of Raffles Institution, or fellow alumnae of Raffles Girls' School, or fellow members of the Stamford Club.<sup>1</sup>

It must be emphasised that the topic of consideration of this study is *not* the life or career of Raffles – that is, the biography of Raffles as an individual; but rather, a consideration of Raffles as the object of veneration and ritual within a colonial civil religion. Those who are interested in the life and career of Sir Stamford Raffles may choose from a number of books about him, such as Charles Wurtzburg's *Raffles of the*

---

<sup>1</sup> Edwin Lee and Tan Tai Yong, *Beyond Degrees*, p. 65.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

*Eastern Isles*, various works by John Bastin,<sup>2</sup> and Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied's recent work, *Rethinking Raffles: A Study of Stamford Raffles' Discourse on Religions Amongst Malays*, to name just a few of the many works which have been written about Raffles, and which generally deal with his life and accomplishments.<sup>3</sup>

This study is concerned instead with the celebration and veneration of Raffles by Asian and European elites in colonial Singapore – especially their representation of Raffles in rituals and publications, throughout the whole course of the colonial era on this island, from 1819 to 1959. This body of ritual practices, newly-invented local traditions, monuments, and publications is considered as a local colonial civil religion, a secular cult focused on Raffles. The English word *cult* is derived from the Latin word *cultus*, meaning *worship*.<sup>4</sup> The use of the term *cult* in the following pages may be compared with the usage of the term *cult of Elizabeth* by historians of England, with regard to Queen Elizabeth I.<sup>5</sup> The term *cult* is used in this study in the sense of a secular civil religion, in which members of various religious faiths cooperated in the *secular* veneration and celebration of an historical figure, through collective representations of this figure as a local hero with his own iconography, rituals, traditions, legends, and mythology.

This sense of the term *cult* must not be confused with the more commonly-used definition of *cult* as a pejorative term for a religious sect which is viewed by others as fanatical and weird, and which typically involves a group of devoted followers of a living

---

<sup>2</sup> See the list of works by John Bastin, in: Eli Solomon, *Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles: A Comprehensive Bibliography*, pp. 6-10.

<sup>3</sup> For a list of books and articles about Raffles, or which contain information on Raffles, see: Eli Solomon, *Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles: A Comprehensive Bibliography*.

<sup>4</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Stephen J. Greenblatt's review of Roy Strong's book, *The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry*, in: *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Winter 1978), pp. 642-644.

leader who claims to have divine status. By contrast, there is no reason to think that the admirers of Raffles who participated in his civil religion or cult (and who thus contributed to his celebration and veneration as a local hero) harboured any illusions that Raffles was a deity, or that their veneration of him as a local hero conflicted in any way with their religious faiths. Instead, they socially sanctified and enshrined Raffles merely in a *secular* sense, as the local founding father of the Settlement of Singapore: as the architect of the free trade policy, the celebrated original lawgiver of the Settlement, the champion of Western education for Asians, and the prophet of the future success of Singapore. The civil religion of Raffles fashioned a secular icon in his image and bearing his name, and this icon has already flourished more than three times longer than the forty-five years that Raffles lived.

### **A Secular Civil Religion**

In a Settlement characterised by a diversity of religious faiths, a secular cult could offer more potential for promoting social integration than any real religion. The cult of Raffles was a *secular civil religion*,<sup>6</sup> in which the local elites fostered collective representations of their shared social structure and its history, and created a sense of a local community with its own heritage and its own heroic founding father. It would have been impossible for the members of the local elite class to develop a sense of community based on a shared religious faith, or a shared racial or ethnic identity, because their class was too diverse in terms of race and religion. Most of the elites in this class were

---

<sup>6</sup> Regarding the concept of *civil religion*, see: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract or Principles of Political Right*, translated by Henry J. Tozer, Book IV, Chapter VIII, p. 227; Robert N. Bellah, *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World*; Steven Lukes, "Political Ritual and Social Integration," in: Steven Lukes, *Essays in Social Theory*, pp. 52-73; Richard K. Fenn, *Beyond Idols: The Shape of a Secular Society*; Anne Rowbottom, "'The Real Royalists': Folk Performance and Civil Religion at Royal Visits," *Folklore*, Volume 109 (1998), pp. 85-86; and: Gordon Marshall, editor, *A Dictionary of Sociology*, p. 73.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

Chinese, but there were also Arab, Armenian, European, Eurasian, Indian, Jewish, Malay, and Parsi elites. The religions of the local elites included Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Taoism, and Zoroastrianism. A secular civil religion, centred on the veneration of a founding father and the creation of new traditions, institutions, rituals, and labels connected with Raffles, provided the elites of different races and ethnicities with a shared system of status symbols, within which they could participate together, enhancing and affirming their prestige and status, giving themselves a sense of centrality and stakeholdership in the colonial system, as well as a sense of membership in a multiracial community of prestige.

There was a theatrical aspect within the colonial state in Singapore – to borrow a term from Clifford Geertz, the colonial state was, to some extent at least, a *theatre state*.<sup>7</sup> Asian and European colonial elites performed together in the public theatre of prestige, as they cooperated in the enjoyment of their shared interests in the acquisition of public honours and status symbols. The colonial system of status symbols, embodied in rituals, institutions, and terminology or labels (such as *Royal* and *Raffles*), functioned as a social magnet for ambitious individuals, attracting elites and would-be elites of different races to cooperate and participate together in this symbolic system. Their cooperative interaction socially and symbolically integrated them into the colonial social structure at the multiracial centre of the ethnically diverse society of this Settlement. The cult of Raffles located his name and his legend at the heart of the local system of status symbols, along with the imperial monarchy. The celebration of imperial royalty was, of course, a

---

<sup>7</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*.

feature of many colonial societies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries;<sup>8</sup> but the celebration of Raffles was unique to Singapore, where Asian and European elites built up a civil religion surrounding the founding father of the Settlement.

Within this civil religion, Asian and European elites sanctified Raffles as the prophet, patron saint and icon of the colonial system in Singapore. Raffles was portrayed as the founding father of Singapore, who established the free port policy, legal equality for all races, respect for the cultures of different races, and an educational system that brought Western-style education to Asians, especially to the children of Asian elites. Asian and European elites served together as the high priests and scribes of this civil religion; although these elites belonged to a variety of religious faiths, they could all participate together in the *civil* religion of the veneration and sanctification of Raffles.

### **Brand-Building the Raffles Name**

Asian and European elites in colonial Singapore cooperated in the development of a sense of heritage, tradition, and collective memory, which was shared by the members of this cosmopolitan class and contributed to the collective representation of their membership in a multiracial colonial elite class or community of prestige. They accomplished this through social gatherings and ceremonies, public celebrations, and written publications – including newspapers, historical accounts, memoirs, guidebooks, annual directories, and who’s who books. The more that any name, image, idea, or legend is publicly celebrated and praised, the more that it can be imbued with the qualities that are claimed for it, until its symbolic value is reified and it becomes taken-for-granted that it is what it has been represented to be, and its prestige or symbolic value

---

<sup>8</sup> See: David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*, and: Bernard S. Cohn, “Representing Authority in Victorian India,” in: Hobsbawm and Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, pp. 165-209.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

becomes *socially real* thanks to acts of representation.<sup>9</sup> These activities created forms of symbolic capital, connected with the prestige of belonging to – or associating with – the shared heritage, tradition, and identity of the community of elites. Perhaps the most important form of symbolic capital created through such elite collective representation was the iconic image of Raffles. The multiracial elite class celebrated Raffles as the founding father of colonial Singapore, fostering a cult of Raffles as the Settlement’s civil religion, complete with its own rituals, traditions, scriptures, hagiography, and icons. The members of the elite class pooled their symbolic resources by cooperating in the investment of symbolic value in their collective representation of Raffles; in this way, they created a ceremonial focal point for future representations and a supply of symbolic capital, which was available for distribution among their membership.

By cultivating the image and collective representation of Raffles, Asian and European elites enhanced the social integration and cohesion of their class, as well as their own individual prestige through association with the name of Raffles. At the same time, they helped perpetuate the survival and reproduction of their colonial social structure, by encouraging future generations of elites to take part in the symbolic system surrounding the Raffles legend. The colonial symbolic system in general, and the civil religion of Raffles in particular, functioned as social mechanisms which promoted the social integration and cohesiveness of the multiracial elite class as a community of prestige, and promoted the continuance of the elite status of its membership, the

---

<sup>9</sup> See the discussions of *social reality* in the following works by Pierre Bourdieu: *The Logic of Practice*, p. 135; *In Other Words*, pp. 53-55 and 195; “The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups,” *Theory and Society*, Volume 14, Number 6 (November 1985), pp. 727, 728, 729, and 731; “The Forms of Capital,” in: John G. Richardson, ed., *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, pp. 251-252; “Social Space and Symbolic Power,” in: Donald McQuarrie, editor, *Readings in Contemporary Sociological Theory*, pp. 327 and 333-334; and: “What Makes a Social Class? On The Theoretical and Practical Existence Of Groups,” in: *Berkeley Journal of Sociology: A Critical Review*, Volume XXXII, 1987, pp. 1 and 13-16.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

recruitment and social assimilation of new members, and the reproduction of this social structure across time.<sup>10</sup>

The local celebration of Raffles and the cultivation of his heroic image began at least as early as his final departure from Singapore in 1823, when the Asian and European merchants of Singapore presented him with a letter of tribute, listing those of his accomplishments which they evidently considered to be most important and praiseworthy.<sup>11</sup> After his death in England in 1826, his widow, his admirers, and various Asian and European elites in Singapore, enshrined and sanctified his image over many years. Their efforts resulted in the establishment and continuity of his heroic image as a social memory and a newly-created tradition in this new colonial Settlement. Their continuing contributions to his cult cultivated and nourished the iconic image of the founding father, and kept this image alive, generation after generation.

This iconic image presented Raffles as an imperial prophet, whose vision for the development of Singapore and its Malayan hinterland could be admired down through the generations – including especially his views on race relations, law and justice, free trade and the freedom of the port, educational policies, town planning, and empire-building. Moreover, after his death, local elites made the iconic image and name of Raffles into a fount of local social honour and prestige, which legitimated and routinised the status and authority of the elites and the institutions within which they interacted and cooperated. The name of Raffles itself became a kind of label or badge of prestige which could be affixed to elites and the ideas and institutions which were important to them. As elites

---

<sup>10</sup> See: Steven Lukes, "Political Ritual and Social Integration," in: Steven Lukes, *Essays in Social Theory*, pp. 52-73.

<sup>11</sup> See the text of this address in: Lady Raffles, *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles*, p. 545.



### *The Cult of Raffles*

created the social memory of Raffles and gave this image the sanctity of tradition, so too did they confer a sense of traditional authority on the institutions of their own elite class. Elite cooperation in the cultivation of the image of Raffles, and the linkage of this sanctified name to the institutions and ideologies which were central to the elite class, promoted the social integration and cohesion of Asian and European elites into the local cosmopolitan community of prestige.

The creation and enhancement of the image of Sir Stamford Raffles was one of the most noteworthy and persistent themes in the development of elite heritage and tradition in colonial Singapore. Asian and European elites cooperated in the project of building up an heroic image of Raffles throughout the colonial period; indeed, this process of celebrating the name of Raffles continued even beyond the colonial era and into the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, with the establishment of new prestigious institutions in the post-colonial era, such as Raffles City Shopping Centre, Raffles Marina, Raffles Country Club, Raffles Hospital, and Raffles Town Club. The name of Raffles is still a popularly recognised symbol of prestige in Singapore today; passengers flying with Singapore Airlines can even choose to travel in the luxurious Raffles Class. The prestige attached to the name of Raffles in Singapore today is an indication of the success of colonial-era elites in endowing his name with so much durable symbolic capital that its value as a symbol within local society has survived the colonial era itself and still continues to thrive even today.

In the colonial era, Sir Stamford's admirers portrayed and celebrated him as the patriotic empire-builder and founder of the Settlement of Singapore;<sup>12</sup> as the architect of the hallowed ideology of the free trade policy; as the wise lawgiver and champion of the

---

<sup>12</sup> See, for example: W.T. Cherry, *Geography of British Malaya* (1923), p. 19.

### *The Cult of Raffles*

legal equality of all people in Singapore (including the property rights which were essential to wealthy Asian and European business men and property owners); and as the promoter of Western-style English-language education for Asians (and especially for Asian elites) in Singapore. The celebration of Raffles provided the foundation myth which legitimised and sanctified the ideologies and institutions of the cosmopolitan elite class in this Southeast Asian port city. These ideologies and institutions underpinned the economic, political, and symbolic success of the multiracial elite class. These elites made the name of Raffles represent the whole package of ideas and traditions at the core of the colonial system here – the ideological and institutional basis of the wealth, power, and prestige of Asian and European elites alike throughout the colonial era.

Asian and European elites associated and cooperated with one another, and asserted their shared membership in the elite class as they celebrated and enhanced the prestigious image of the posthumous persona of Raffles through institutions, rituals, and published writings. They created an heroic tradition and a public memory of Raffles, casting him as the legendary ancestor or founding father of the local elite community and its traditions and ideologies, in much the same way that Malay rulers traditionally claimed descent from Alexander the Great.<sup>13</sup> Over the years, various speeches and publications asserted the connection of Raffles to different aspects of the colonial system, cultivating the sense of heritage, that Raffles had established some of the central traditions and institutions of the Settlement, including the free port policy, the principle of equality for everyone before the law, respect for Asian customs and religions, Western

---

<sup>13</sup> Anthony Milner, *Kerajaan: Malay Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule*, pp. 5, 72, 81, 83, 87, and 96. I am very grateful to A/P Yong Mun Cheong for bringing this book to my attention in 2002.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

education for the sons of Asian elites, and a general belief in making Singapore a place where Asian and European businessmen could succeed.

Elite celebrations, institutions, and writings dedicated to the memory of Raffles created a valuable form of symbolic capital linked to his name – something like a *brand name* – which was unique to Singapore; this symbolic capital (the *Raffles* label) was shared and exchanged among the multiracial elites. They reinforced the social connections among themselves – the social capital which gave cohesion to their elite class or community – as they shared and exchanged symbolic capital by associating themselves with the name of Raffles, a name which they invested with such prestige that it became legendary, heroic, and practically sacred over the years.<sup>14</sup> As they worked together to elevate Sir Stamford's name to a locally legendary status, Asian and European elites engaged in a long-running brand-building exercise which was so successful that the *Raffles* brand lives on even today.

Elites inscribed the name of Raffles upon the physical and institutional landscape, especially the buildings and places which were closely associated with the elites and their activities, so that even visitors from overseas stopping briefly in Singapore repeatedly encountered memorials to his august persona: Raffles Place, Raffles Quay, Raffles Institution, Raffles Girls' School, Raffles Library and Museum, Raffles Hotel, and, of course, his bronze statue, which presided over the Esplanade from its original unveiling

---

<sup>14</sup> Regarding social exchange, see: Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, pp. 387 and 389; Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, p. 175; Marcel Mauss, *The Gift (Essai sur le don)*, p. 10 and 11; Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship (Les Structures Élémentaires de la Parenté)*, pp. 59-60 and 68; Peter M. Blau, *Exchange and Power in Social Life*, pp. 4, 89, 92, and 107; Alvin W. Gouldner, "The Norm of Reciprocity: A Preliminary Statement." *American Sociological Review*, Volume 25, Number 2 (April 1960), pp. 161-178; and: Pierre Bourdieu, "The Economy of Symbolic Goods," in: *Practical Reason*, pp. 100 and 104.

during Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887<sup>15</sup> until 1919, when it was moved to Victoria Memorial Hall at Empress Place, just in time for another unveiling ceremony, this time in honour of the centennial celebrations of the establishment of the Settlement. In this new location, the statue was enshrined in a semi-circular classical colonnade, which framed and dignified the image of Raffles, much as ancient Greek temples once enclosed the statues of gods.<sup>16</sup> Asian elites took prominent parts in the ceremonies involving the Raffles statue in 1887 and 1919, together with their European fellow elites.

### **The Scriptural Legacy of the Founding Father**

It must not be assumed that Raffles was consigned to a merely passive role in the elaboration of his legend. He was more to his cult than just its icon and object of veneration, hagiography, and apotheosis. On the contrary, he took a very active role in his cult, even from beyond the grave, since the scriptural tradition of his cult derived in large part from his own writings. His published works, together with his papers, which his widow compiled into her *Memoir*, comprised what may be regarded as the scriptural legacy of his cult. Indeed, his contribution to his own hagiography would certainly have been far greater, were it not for the destruction of many of his writings in a shipwreck in 1824. Still, enough of his writings were extant at the time of his death in 1826 to supply material for quotation by his admirers – for example, in the works of Sir Ong Siang Song, Sir Frank Swettenham, Charles Burton Buckley, C.M. Phillips, R.D. Pringle, the Reverend J.A. Bethune Cook, the Reverend William Cross, F.M. Luscombe, and Charles Wurtzburg. During his career in Southeast Asia, Raffles faced criticism from some of his

---

<sup>15</sup> *Straits Times* (weekly issue), 6 July 1887, p. 7, NUS microfilm reel R0011435.

<sup>16</sup> For descriptions of the crescent-shaped colonnade, see the *Straits Times*, 7 February 1919, p. 10, NUS microfilm reel R0016569, and: Ambrose Pratt, *Magical Malaya* (1931), p. 25. See also the photo that is the frontispiece of Walter Makepeace *et al.*, *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume Two.

colleagues within the East India Company, who may well have been jealous of him, and his *Statement* of 1824 detailed his accomplishments and defended his actions against such criticism.<sup>17</sup> This *Statement*, as well as his letters published in 1830 in his widow's *Memoir*,<sup>18</sup> supplied quotable quotes for generations of his admirers and hagiographers, whose works contributed to the veneration of his memory and the elaboration of his cult. By compiling the *Memoir* and having it published, Lady Raffles completed her husband's efforts to ensure that his story was made available to the public; she gathered together and published whatever of her husband's papers that she could find, especially his letters to prominent people.<sup>19</sup>

Ambitious personalities are likely aided in their careers by their confidence in their own abilities and their beliefs in their own righteousness or sense of mission. Sir Stamford's writings in his *Statement* and quoted in his widow's *Memoir* reveal a robust sense of self-esteem, a strong belief in his own vision, and a fervent desire to defend and justify himself vigorously in the face of criticism. His writings convey an impression of an *ambitious* personality – indeed, Raffles mentioned the *insatiable* nature of his ambition in a letter he wrote to William Ramsay in 1811, which Lady Raffles quoted in her *Memoir*.<sup>20</sup> His statements, having been designed to assert his accomplishments and defend his decisions during his lifetime, would serve equally well – in fact, probably even better – to build up his own cult after his death. The ghostly hand of Raffles was evident throughout the development of his cult during the colonial era, as his spirited defence of

---

<sup>17</sup> Sir Stamford Raffles, *Statement of the Services of Sir Stamford Raffles* (1824), reprinted with an Introduction by John Bastin (1978).

<sup>18</sup> Lady Raffles, *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles* (1830), reprinted with an Introduction by John Bastin (1991).

<sup>19</sup> See John Bastin's Introduction to the 1991 edition of the *Memoir* by Lady Raffles, especially p. v.

<sup>20</sup> Lady Raffles, *Memoir* (1830), p. 88; see also: Wurtzburg, *Raffles of the Eastern Isles*, p. 19.

his actions, as well as his strong sense of purpose, and his confidence in his abilities and the importance of his many achievements, lived on even after his death, in the passages of his frequently quoted writings.

His writings presented his establishment of the Settlement of Singapore as the revival of a legendary place of ancient glory. It might be imagined that Raffles would have been tempted to downplay this island's pre-European past, or even to deny that this place had ever enjoyed any importance, so as to highlight his own achievement in founding a new Settlement; however, this was not the case. Indeed, Raffles not only did not attempt to conceal the fact that he was hardly the first founder of Singapore, and that the history of Singapura and Temasek was already regarded as ancient long before he appeared on the scene; on the contrary, he enthusiastically drew attention to this island's pre-European past, especially to the traditional Malay accounts of the island's Asian heroes, as recorded in the narrative that is now commonly known as the *Sejarah Melayu*. If anything, Raffles actually exaggerated the former glory of this place, by referring to it as an ancient *city* that had once been the capital of a former Malayan *empire*.<sup>21</sup>

Raffles was possessive of Singapore – even calling it his *child* – but he also associated himself with the ancient and legendary Asian founders and explorers, and thereby placed himself on their legendary level, associated himself with their glorious past, and asserted the importance of his own activities on this island. He was himself aspiring to legendary status, like the heroic figures of the *Sejarah Melayu*, a traditional Malay account of Singapore's past in which Raffles himself played a key role in popularising by his sponsorship of the publication of the English translation of this

---

<sup>21</sup> Sir Stamford Raffles, letter to William Marsden, 31 January 1819, in: Lady Raffles, *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles* (1830; reprinted in 1991), p. 376.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

narrative by his late friend Leyden. Clearly, Raffles wanted his fellow Britons to know that there was something important in Singapore long before he came along. In the beginning in Singapore, there was not only Raffles – there was also Sang Nila Utama. This paralleled his interest in Javanese history and archaeology while he was Lieutenant-Governor of Java from 1811 to 1816. For example, his interest in Borobudur. The greater the historic interest and legendary importance of Singapore, the greater the significance of his achievement in founding a new Settlement on the hallowed ground of this time-honoured site. Thanks in large part to Sir Stamford's own literary efforts, the subsequent cult of Raffles could present the story of his founding of the Settlement of Singapore as, in effect, another chapter in the *Sejarah Melayu*. Through his writings, Raffles carefully built the foundations and set the stage for his own cult – whether or not he had any inkling of the extent to which he would be venerated and deified after death, and the degree to which his *child* (as he called the Settlement of Singapore) would become his shrine and monument.

Sir Stamford's writings – the basis of the scriptural tradition of his cult and his own hagiography – linked the past, present, and future, as legends and scriptures can. A reader of Sir Stamford's writings may gain the impression that Raffles was connected back in time to Rajah Chulan and Sang Nila Utama, and forward in time to the twenty-first century. In his writings, we find allusions to the ancient past, the ancient *city* and its *empire*, juxtaposed with *his* present – his concern for even the most minute details of everyday life in *his* new Settlement in its early years – its schools, streets, and laws – his grand visions of the future of Singapore – his College, his first capital of the nineteenth

## *The Cult of Raffles*

century,<sup>22</sup> his planning two hundred years in advance<sup>23</sup> – the cult of Raffles was able to take root and flourish after his death in large part because of all the rich scriptural nourishment which he had bequeathed it as his literary legacy.

The bungalow which Raffles built during his last visit to Singapore was located in a place which had ancient connections with Malay heritage and traditions of authority. By building his bungalow on *Bukit Larangan*, the Forbidden Hill, Raffles associated himself with a place which was sacred to the Malays.<sup>24</sup> Raffles believed that the tombs of Malay kings were near this bungalow, and he wrote that, if he died in Singapore, he wanted to be buried near these tombs.<sup>25</sup> The association of new European colonial authority with the traditional authority of Malay royalty may be an example of a practice described by D.A. Low, in which one of the characteristics of the early stages of imperialism is the incorporation of traditional authority into the new imperial authority structure. D.A. Low discussed the incorporation of traditional elite personnel into the organisational structure of this new imperial authority – for example, by institutionalising the exercise of imperial authority through alliances formed with traditional kings, chiefs, and village headmen, or by securing the status of elites who were not dominant, or even by selecting new chiefs.<sup>26</sup>

Reading Sir Stamford's writings, one gets the distinct impression that Raffles would not have been at all displeased about the way his cult flowered after his death. On the contrary, he would likely as not have been rather pleased, as indicated by his careful

---

<sup>22</sup> Sir Stamford Raffles, letter dated 10 December 1822, in: Lady Raffles, *Memoir* (1830), p. 532.

<sup>23</sup> Sir Stamford Raffles, letter dated 12 June 1823, in: Lady Raffles, *Memoir* (1830), p. 548.

<sup>24</sup> C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 53.

<sup>25</sup> Sir Stamford Raffles, letter to William Marsden, 21 January 1823, and: letter to the Duchess of Somerset, 23 January 1823, in: Lady Raffles, *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles* (1830; reprinted in 1991), p. 535.

<sup>26</sup> D.A. Low, *Lion Rampant: Essays in the Study of British Imperialism*, pp. 17, 18-19, and 28.



labours to compose his own scriptural legacy. He clearly wrote for posterity. It is remarkable that, in spite of the loss of many of his papers in a shipwreck off Sumatra in 1824, as well as his own early death in 1826, he still managed to leave behind a substantial body of writings, which formed an ample scriptural legacy for the future cultivation and nourishment of his cult.

The frequent quotations of Raffles in various colonial-era publications suggest that his writings may have had some influence on the way in which succeeding generations of Europeans viewed the history and prehistory of Singapore and Malaya<sup>27</sup> – indeed, Raffles might have intended as much, when he composed his *Statement* and his letters to prominent personages that were published posthumously in the *Memoir*.<sup>28</sup>

### **The Historical Development of the Heroic Image of Raffles**

The cultivation of the heroic image of Raffles through the celebration of his memory was a constant theme throughout the history of colonial Singapore. However, it may be that this conclusion has not always been accepted by students of the history of Singapore, and indeed, it may still not be accepted today. C.N. Parkinson explained that the story of Raffles did not attract much interest from 1830 to 1874 – that is, from the time of the publication of the *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles*, to the time when an English translation of the *Hikayat Abdullah* was published. According to Parkinson, interest in Raffles experienced a revival in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, following the transfer of Singapore and the other Straits

---

<sup>27</sup> Compare this with comments by Virginia Matheson Hooker and M.B. Hooker on the influence of Leyden's *Malay Annals*, which was published through the efforts of Raffles; see: Virginia Matheson Hooker and M.B. Hooker, *John Leyden's Malay Annals*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>28</sup> John Bastin has noted that Sir Stamford's reputation was established by the publication of his widow's *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles* in 1830. See John Bastin's Introduction to the 1991 Oxford University Press edition of the *Memoir*, p. v.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

Settlements to the Colonial Office in 1867, and the completion of the Suez Canal in 1869, which provided a boost to Singapore.<sup>29</sup> The British intervention in the Malay Peninsula in the 1870s likely also stimulated interest among the British reading public in Malaya and, thus, in Raffles.<sup>30</sup> Parkinson's conclusion that there was a lack of interest in Raffles in the middle of the nineteenth century, and that Raffles became a fashionable topic at the end of that century, may well be correct with regard to the interest in Raffles *in Britain*, or on an Empire-wide level. However, the history of the interest in Raffles *in Singapore* presents a very different picture, one in which the interest in Raffles never went out of fashion.

The study of the social history of colonial Singapore reveals clear evidence that local interest in Raffles was a perennial theme, which persisted throughout the colonial era. Even when this interest was not actually evident, it had not died out, but was just beneath the surface, waiting for the next opportunity to re-emerge in the life of the society, and to be expressed in celebrations and commemorations, as well as in discussions and publications. The local elites never forgot about Raffles; after all, they believed that they owed everything to him.

The celebration of Raffles and the cultivation of his heroic image began in the early years of the Settlement. In 1823, when Raffles was about to leave this island for the last time, the Asian and European merchants of Singapore offered him a letter of praise, expressing their gratitude for his founding of the Settlement; this message highlighted

---

<sup>29</sup> C.N. Parkinson, "A Review of Charles Wurtzburg's 'Raffles of the Eastern Isles'," *The Malayan Historical Journal*, Volume 2, Number 1 (July 1955), pp. 60-61.

<sup>30</sup> On the history of British intervention in Malaya, see, for example: C. Northcote Parkinson, *British Intervention in Malaya 1867-1877*.

what the merchants apparently believed were the best of his policies.<sup>31</sup> This is typical of the process of building up the image of Raffles over the years, as local elites selectively highlighted certain themes within what became the Raffles legend. We may see how the local celebration of Raffles became established and traditional by considering a number of early examples of such celebratory and commemorative activities.

After Raffles left Singapore in 1823, the celebration of his founding of the Settlement quickly became institutionalised and traditional. The sixth of February, 1824, the fifth anniversary of the founding of the Settlement by Raffles, was celebrated with a dinner at the home of the Resident, John Crawfurd. On this occasion, the guests at the dinner raised their glasses in a toast to Raffles, in company with toasts to the King, the Governor-General of India, and other very important people. An account of this event was recorded in the journal of one of the guests, a local Scottish businessman named Walter Scott Duncan, who devoted several lines in his journal to the praise of Raffles.<sup>32</sup> Judging from Duncan's comments about Raffles, apparently intended only for his own reading, it would seem that the Raffles legend had already begun to take root and flourish in Singapore as early as 1824.

### **The Founding of the Raffles Club in 1825**

In 1825, a group of prominent local gentlemen founded the *Raffles Club*. The purpose of this club was to commemorate and honour Raffles annually by arranging social gatherings on his birthday, including dining and dancing. It seems rather

---

<sup>31</sup> See the text of this address in: Lady Raffles, *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles*, p. 545.

<sup>32</sup> Walter Scott Duncan, *Singapore Sixty Years Ago; Including Journal by Mr. Walter Scott Duncan, February to June, 1824*. Reprinted from the *Straits Times*. Singapore: Straits Times Press, 1883. (This journal is preserved in Singapore National Library microfilm reel NL 5406, which is labelled "Sri Poestaka.") See the account of the dinner on 6 February 1824 on pp. 4-5.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

remarkable that Raffles was so popular in Singapore at this time, that a club would be founded for the purpose of honouring him; and it is all the more remarkable, considering that the Raffles Club was apparently the first European club to be established in Singapore. Thus, only six years after the founding of the Settlement, Raffles already had his own local fan club, apparently devoted to venerating him as the local hero of colonial Singapore, while also promoting the social interaction of the club's members. The *Singapore Chronicle* – the first newspaper in the Settlement – published a report of the Raffles Club's first celebration of its hero's birthday in 1825, together with an explanation of the objects of this club.<sup>33</sup> This report, which referred to Raffles as the Settlement's *founder*, indicated that the members of the club believed that the success of Singapore was mainly thanks to the efforts of Raffles.

The founding of the Raffles Club and the publicity given to it in the local press likely enhanced the sense of importance attached to Raffles in the public consciousness. However, this was not without controversy; the founding of the Raffles Club provoked someone who preferred to be known only as *A Singaporean* to write a letter to the *Singapore Chronicle* arguing that Raffles should not be given all the credit for founding the Settlement, and asserting that Colonel William Farquhar had as much right as Raffles to be regarded as the founder. This letter was apparently published in the *Singapore Chronicle* sometime in 1825 (in an issue which is no longer extant), and was reprinted in 1826 in *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British India and its*

---

<sup>33</sup> Regarding the founding of the Raffles Club on 30 June 1825, see: *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British India and its Dependencies*, Vol. XXI, No. 124, April 1826, pp. 529-530, quoting an article which appeared in the *Singapore Chronicle* of 21 July 1825.

*Dependencies*.<sup>34</sup> Of course, such controversy and debate also served to further publicise the importance of Raffles in the history and social memory of the growing Settlement. Criticism, debate, and praise all nourished and contributed to the nascent cult of Raffles.

The meetings and social activities of the Raffles Club, as well as the report of its activities in the press, must have helped to cultivate the notion of the central importance of Raffles in the establishment and growth of Singapore, at least among those inhabitants of the Settlement who could read the English-language *Singapore Chronicle*. Unfortunately, this article does not provide the names of the members or guests of the club, but it seems likely that they were Europeans; still, the involvement of Asian elites in this organization cannot be ruled out, since Walter Scott Duncan's journal shows that Europeans were already socializing with Asians in Singapore at this time: for example, Duncan described the visit of a group of Europeans to the home of a Chinese merchant in March 1824, where they were treated to a feast of *laksa* and other tasty dishes, and by May 1824, Duncan had made friends with a Chinese resident of Singapore named Captain Ong Ban Hok. It is easy to imagine Walter Duncan and Captain Ong attending a social function organised by the Raffles Club, but without information on the club's membership and guests, we are left with only speculation. Whether or not the Raffles Club included Asian members, it is clear that this club played an important role in the inception of the tradition of local celebrations of Raffles, a tradition in which Asian elites would take part extensively over the years. The Raffles Club reportedly died out in

---

<sup>34</sup> *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British India and its Dependencies*, Volume XXI, No. 124, April 1826, p. 530, British Library shelf mark ST 76.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

1835,<sup>35</sup> but by that time, the annual celebration of Raffles had already become a well-established local tradition.

The anniversary of the founding of the Settlement of Singapore by Raffles on 6 February 1819 soon became established as an important date in Singapore, a date worthy of commemoration and celebration. In April 1826, S.G. Bonham, the Acting Resident of Singapore, informed his superiors in India that it had become *customary* for the *principal* residents of Singapore to celebrate the anniversary of the founding of the Settlement, as well as the birthday of King George IV and New Year's Day, with a public entertainment, and that Bonham himself had accordingly hosted such an entertainment on 6 February 1826, which cost 295 Spanish Dollars and 47 Cents.<sup>36</sup> The authorities in India evidently approved of this newly-established local custom in Singapore, since they granted Bonham's request to use public funds to pay for this celebration – a decision which could only have encouraged succeeding administrators to follow Bonham's example in hosting such festivities in honour of Raffles.<sup>37</sup>

Sir Stamford Raffles died in England in July 1826, but the news of his death apparently reached Singapore only in January 1827, when an obituary was published in the *Singapore Chronicle*.<sup>38</sup> Though Raffles was gone, his heroic image as the founder of the Settlement lived on and flourished. The publication of his obituary in the *Singapore Chronicle* helped to keep his name in view of the English-literate section of the population, and reinforced his legend in the public memory. This newspaper did not only

---

<sup>35</sup> C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 439.

<sup>36</sup> India Office Records I.O.R. / F / 4 / 1050 / 28824, pp. 3-4, text of a letter from S.G. Bonham, Acting Resident of Singapore, to Chief Secretary Lushington, dated 3 April 1826, in a volume labelled "Board's Collections 28767 to 29049 1828 – 1829. VOL. 1050 F / 4 / 1050 Record Department," in the collection of the British Library, Euston Road, London. I am very grateful to Clement Liew for his kind assistance.

<sup>37</sup> "Extract Public Letter from Bengal, dated 21<sup>st</sup> March 1827," Para. 219, in: India Office Records I.O.R. / F / 4 / 1050 / 28824, British Library.

<sup>38</sup> *Singapore Chronicle*, 4 January 1827, p. 2, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0009222.

print articles which praised Raffles as the founder of the Settlement; it also published letters which called into question the tendency to give Raffles all the credit for the founding, including a letter from Colonel William Farquhar, published in 1831.<sup>39</sup> But even these critical articles contributed to the Raffles legend, as they helped to keep his name in the consciousness of at least some of the English-literate inhabitants of Singapore. The image of Raffles was nourished and cultivated through celebration and publicity, including the publicity given to criticism. Even Colonel William Farquhar had contributed to the cult of Raffles.

### **Syed Omar and the Proposed Monument to Raffles in 1827**

In February 1827, the *Singapore Chronicle* reported that the friends of Raffles had held a meeting in late January to form a committee with the object of raising funds for a monument to the memory of Raffles. All of the names mentioned in this article are European,<sup>40</sup> but a subsequent report published two weeks later in the *Singapore Chronicle* showed that the Raffles monument fund had received a donation of fifty dollars from Syed Omar Joneid.<sup>41</sup> This Syed Omar may have been Syed Omar bin Ali Al-Junied, a wealthy Arab businessman who arrived in Singapore from Palembang in 1819,<sup>42</sup> and who built the first mosque in Singapore, the original Omar Kampong Malacca Mosque, in 1820,<sup>43</sup> located behind the future site of the Ministry of Manpower Building along Havelock Road.

---

<sup>39</sup> *Singapore Chronicle*, 10 March 1831, p. 2, microfilm reel R0009223. See also the letter from A *Singaporean*, originally published in the *Singapore Chronicle*, and reprinted in: *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British India and its Dependencies*, Volume XXI, No. 124, April 1826, p. 530, British Library shelf mark ST 76.

<sup>40</sup> *Singapore Chronicle*, 1 February 1827, p. 1, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0009222.

<sup>41</sup> *Singapore Chronicle*, 15 February 1827, p. 1, microfilm reel R0009222.

<sup>42</sup> C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*, p. 14.

<sup>43</sup> Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*, p. 400.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

Syed Omar was an early example of the many Asian elites in colonial Singapore who participated in the celebration of the memory of Raffles, the building-up of his legendary image in the local social memory, and the invention of the new Raffles tradition. Syed Omar's donation of fifty dollars was reported in the *Singapore Chronicle* along with donations of twenty-five dollars by Alexander Guthrie and James Scott Clark, which is an early example of the publication of accounts of Asian and European elites working together to honour the memory of Raffles, and thereby participating together in the colonial symbolic system. These themes in elite-level interracial social integration were to continue throughout the colonial era.

In March 1827, the *Singapore Chronicle* reported that Syed Mohamed Habshy and Bawa Sah had donated funds towards the monument to Raffles, along with several Europeans.<sup>44</sup> Syed Mohamed Habshy and Bawa Sah were following in the footsteps of Syed Omar and his donation to the monument fund. Through their donations and the publicity given to them in the *Singapore Chronicle*, they asserted that they, too, belonged to the elite class, along with their European fellow elites, at the centre of the colonial society. In this way, they helped foster the sense of a multiracial community of prestige as a social reality, as well as a shared system of colonial status symbols. Together, they helped establish a tradition of well-to-do Asians cooperating with Europeans in the celebration of the memory of Raffles, cultivating the symbolic value of his name and legend as a central icon in the Settlement's local system of status symbols that was shared by Asian and European elites alike.

---

<sup>44</sup> *Singapore Chronicle*, 1 March 1827, p. 2, microfilm reel R0009222.



### **King George's Birthday in 1827**

Although Raffles was deceased, new local traditions were emerging which would continue to keep his memory alive, generation after generation. Raffles was even honoured during a royal celebration less than a year after his death. In April 1827, a celebration of the birthday of King George IV was held on Government Hill, the hill which is now known as Fort Canning Hill. This celebration was held at night by lamplight, and Javanese dancers and musicians entertained the guests before the dinner and the loyal toasts. After toasting King George IV, the gathering proceeded to toast the Royal Dukes of York and Clarence (the King's brothers), His Majesty's Army and the Royal Navy, Governor-General Lord Amherst of India, and Governor Fullerton of the Straits Settlements, among others.

The memory of Raffles was also toasted during this celebration, which put his name in the distinguished company of the names the King and two royal dukes, one of whom (the Duke of Clarence) became King William IV in 1830, on the death of his brother, King George IV. The toast to Raffles was all the more distinctive because, in the list of names published in the *Singapore Chronicle* showing the important people who were honoured with toasts after the loyal toast to the King, Raffles was the only one of these people who was no longer alive. Raffles was accorded the honour of posthumous commemoration in death, an honour which was evidently not given to anyone else at this event, not even to the last monarch, King George III, who died in 1820. While toasts are customarily proposed to someone's *health*, in the late Sir Stamford's case, it was obviously impossible to toast his health anymore – but it was still possible for his admirers to promote the health of his heroic legend and his emerging cult, by celebrating

his memory with tributes, rituals, publications, and monuments. This event helped to establish a precedent. If the departed Raffles could be honoured less than a year after his death, during a local celebration in honour of the reigning King, then the way was open for Raffles to be honoured year after year – it was already established that, even in death, he was still a local hero, who could potentially be honoured forever.

This royal birthday celebration included at least two elite Asian guests, Sultan Hussein and Tun Ibrahim, the second son and successor of Temenggong Abdul Rahman,<sup>45</sup> who died in 1825. Tun Ibrahim, who was also known as Daing Ronggek, Tengku Chik, and Daing Kechil, was ceremonially installed as Temenggong only in 1841.<sup>46</sup> This may have been the first instance of Malay leaders taking part in celebrations of Raffles and royalty in Singapore (or at least one of the earliest), but it would certainly not be the last. Sultan Hussein's grandson and Tun Ibrahim's son stood next to Governor Weld when he unveiled the statue of Raffles on the Padang in 1887, during the local celebrations of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee.<sup>47</sup>

The royal birthday celebration in 1827 was an early example of how the name of Raffles was kept alive, in part by celebrating him in the company of the names of other, higher-ranking people who were still in the world of the living, in gatherings where both Asian and European elites were present. The tradition of associating toasts to the memory of Raffles with toasts to living Kings was carried on in the following year, when a dinner on 28 April 1828 in honour of the birthday of King George IV featured toasts to the King, other members of the royal family, the Duke of Wellington, the East India

---

<sup>45</sup> *Singapore Chronicle*, 26 April 1827, p. 3, R0009222.

<sup>46</sup> Sir Richard Winstedt, *A History of Johore (1365-1895)*, pp. 89 and 91.

<sup>47</sup> *Straits Times*, weekly issue, 6 July 1887, p. 7, R0011435. See also the photograph of this event in: Demetrius Charles Boulger, *The Life of Sir Stamford Raffles*, p. XXXII.

Company, the Governor-General, and the memory of Raffles.<sup>48</sup> It would seem that a new local tradition of celebrating Raffles was becoming firmly entrenched, as Raffles was routinely honoured and socially sanctified, even in death.

The local civil religion devoted to the memory of Raffles was firmly established by 1827. The Raffles Club continued their activities in honour of Raffles despite his death, holding a banquet on 6 July 1827 that was hosted by John Prince, the Resident Councillor of Singapore. Since Raffles was born on 6 July 1781 and died on 5 July 1826, a celebration of his memory in early July could be regarded as a commemoration of both his birth and his death.<sup>49</sup> In view of the recent death of their hero, the members of the Raffles Club decided not to have the usual dance, but there were toasts to Raffles, Lady Raffles, and their daughter, as well as toasts that were described as *patriotic*, probably in honour of King George IV and other important people in Britain, as happened during the royal birthday celebration a few months earlier. The report on the banquet in July 1827 praised the splendid illumination and other arrangements, which suggests that this rather somber celebration nevertheless (or thereby) succeeded in impressing those who attended.<sup>50</sup>

### **Choa Chong Long's Famous Banquet in 1831**

The birthday party of a wealthy Chinese businessman of Singapore named Choa Chong Long in June 1831 was the occasion for yet another round of toasting, which included a toast to the memory of Raffles. Choa Chong Long, who has been described as

---

<sup>48</sup> *Singapore Chronicle*, 8 May 1828, p. 1, R0009222.

<sup>49</sup> C.E. Wurtzburg, "The Birthday of Sir Stamford Raffles," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume Twenty, Part One (June 1947), p. 187.

<sup>50</sup> *Singapore Chronicle*, 19 July 1827, p. 1, R0009222.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

the first Chinese opium merchant to control the opium monopoly in Singapore,<sup>51</sup> was evidently well-known for his vast wealth (which was apparently derived at least in part from the opium addictions of many of his fellow Chinese), and he owned property in what is now Raffles Place.<sup>52</sup> He was the son of the Chinese Captain of Malacca, and had a big mansion in Singapore which was admired by at least one European, who regarded it as one of the most impressive buildings in Singapore; Choa used this mansion to host parties for Europeans.<sup>53</sup>

Choa Chong Long hosted his famous birthday banquet in June 1831 for over forty gentlemen; although their names were not listed in the report published in the *Singapore Chronicle*, the company was described as *mixed* and as including *influential* people – thus, it is almost certain that the guests included both Asian and European elites. Both Chinese and Western foods were served while musicians entertained the guests, and toasts were proposed to a number of important people, starting with King William IV of Great Britain and the Emperor of China, together with the health of the host, Choa Chong Long. After toasting the Chinese people of Singapore and the understanding between these Chinese and the British, the guests toasted the memory of Raffles, referring to him as the founder of the Settlement. This toast was followed by toasts to Earl Grey and the Duke of Wellington, placing Raffles in very good company – and, at the same time, placing the memory of the dead founder in the company of *living* people of very high rank.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, p. 232.

<sup>52</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 25.

<sup>53</sup> George Windsor Earl, *The Eastern Seas* (1837), pp. 363-364.

<sup>54</sup> *Singapore Chronicle*, 9 June 1831, p. 3, R0009223.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

Unfortunately, Choa Chong Long did not live long to enjoy his popularity as a well-known local host; he was murdered by burglars in Macao in December 1838.<sup>55</sup> Yet, he had already succeeded in making his mark on Singapore society, joining the cast of characters in the written record of Singapore's history. Choa Chong Long's name and his reputation as a host found their way into the press, and thence into the history books. Thanks to the publication of an account of his birthday party in the *Singapore Chronicle*, this event subsequently appeared in Charles Burton Buckley's *Anecdotal History* in 1902, and then in Sir Ong Siang Song's *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore* in 1923.<sup>56</sup> Choa Chong Long's renowned birthday banquet helped bring Asian and European elites together in the veneration of the founding father, thus contributing to the new local traditions surrounding the celebration of Raffles and the symbolic value of his name.

### **Early Monuments to Raffles in Print and Marble**

The commemoration of Raffles continued over the years, in the form of publications as well as monuments and celebrations. His widow, Lady Raffles, published her *Memoir* about her late husband in 1830, and she commissioned a marble statue of Raffles with an inscribed pedestal, which was sculpted by Sir Francis Chantrey and placed in Westminster Abbey in 1832.<sup>57</sup> The inscription on the pedestal of this statue describes Raffles as the first President of the London Zoological Society and the Lieutenant-Governor of Java, as well as the founder of an Emporium at Singapore, where he was credited with establishing both the freedom of the trade of the port and the

---

<sup>55</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 30.

<sup>56</sup> C.B. Buckley, pp. 215-216; Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 29-30.

<sup>57</sup> John Bastin, "Raffles in Marble & Bronze," *The Straits Times Annual for 1972*, pp. 61 and 63.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

personal freedom of the inhabitants (presumably a reference to his efforts to suppress slavery).<sup>58</sup>

Reading the inscription beneath his statue in Westminster Abbey reminds us that Sir Stamford's activities were not limited to Singapore, and helps us to understand the nature of the cult of Raffles in Singapore, a cult which was centred on the celebration of his accomplishments on this island. In fact, Raffles achieved a number of significant accomplishments before he ever set foot on the island of Singapore. He served as Lieutenant-Governor of Java (a far larger and richer island than Singapore!) from 1811 to 1816, where he visited the spectacular ancient Buddhist *stupa* of Borobudur in central Java. After he returned to England in 1816, he began writing a book, called *The History of Java*, which was published in 1817. This book provided its readers with a great deal of information on Java, including a description of Borobudur. The book evidently impressed the Prince Regent (the future King George IV), who knighted Raffles in 1817.

Thus, Sir Stamford's accomplishments had already been recognised by public and royal honours even before Raffles first arrived in Singapore in 1819. After his final departure from Singapore in 1823, Raffles managed to establish the London Zoological Society shortly before his death, despite the severe health problems which plagued him in the last years of his life. However, in the decades following his death in 1826, his establishment of the Settlement of Singapore loomed larger and larger in the public memory and image of the man, practically eclipsing all his other accomplishments in the popular consciousness in Singapore. The cult of Raffles in Singapore focussed on his role as the founding father of this Settlement; indeed, it could be argued that this cult was

---

<sup>58</sup> The text of the inscription may be found in: C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 15.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

really more about Singapore than it was about Raffles. This local cult represented the Settlement as, to a great degree, a product of Sir Stamford's ideas and principles.

This cult portrayed its hero as *Raffles of Singapore*, even though his sojourns in Penang, in Java, and in Bencoolen were each longer than the total of less than ten months that he spent in Singapore, during his three visits to this island between January 1819 and June 1823.<sup>59</sup> Yet, who would describe Raffles as *Raffles of Penang*, *Raffles of Java*, or *Raffles of Bencoolen*? The cult of Raffles accorded to Singapore a virtually exclusive claim to his legacy; generations after his death, Singapore became, in effect, his last surviving "child" (unless we count the London Zoo as another of his "children"). Raffles himself sometimes referred to Singapore as his *child* in his letters.

Sir Stamford's obituary, published in the *Gentlemen's Magazine* for July 1826, predicted that his book, *The History of Java*, would serve as an enduring memorial to his renown; and the writing of this book may indeed have been one of his most well-known accomplishments at the time of his death.<sup>60</sup> Only a small part of this obituary dealt with his activities in Singapore. Yet, how many people today have heard of Sir Stamford's book *The History of Java*? It seems more likely that, insofar as Raffles is known at all today, he is known as the founder of Singapore, rather than as the author of *The History of Java*, or as the Lieutenant-Governor of Java. This is consistent with the Singapore-centred orientation of the cult of Raffles. It would be left to his scholarly biographers, Demetrius Boulger, Hugh Edward Egerton, Sir Reginald Coupland, and Charles Wurtzburg, to research and present Sir Stamford's life before and after its Singapore

---

<sup>59</sup> Ernest C.T. Chew, "Founders and Builders of Early Colonial Singapore," in: Irene Lim, editor, *Sketching the Straits: A Compilation of the Lecture Series on the Charles Dyce Collection*, p. 24.

<sup>60</sup> Obituary, *Gentlemen's Magazine*, July 1826, in: *Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles: Book of Days*, pp. 10-19; *The History of Java* is mentioned on p. 11.

chapter, while more recently, two professional historians, John Bastin and Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied, have devoted their considerable skill to further research and analysis of Sir Stamford's life and career.

### **The *Memoir***

The *Memoir* that was compiled by Lady Raffles and first published in 1830 contains a compilation of letters and documents written by her late husband, which detail his various efforts and accomplishments, including the establishment of the Settlement of Singapore and its free trade policy, as well as his efforts to establish educational and judicial institutions which would benefit Asians as well as Europeans in Singapore.<sup>61</sup> The publication of the *Memoir* provoked correspondence from William Farquhar demanding credit for the founding of the Settlement, which was published in the *Asiatic Journal* and reprinted in the *Singapore Chronicle* in March 1831<sup>62</sup> – all of which helped to keep the name of Raffles alive in Singapore and elsewhere. In December 1831, the *Singapore Chronicle* quoted extracts from the *Memoir* by Lady Raffles, and praised Raffles as the liberal and enlightened founder of the Settlement, despite Colonel Farquhar's claims.<sup>63</sup> It would seem that Singapore society had firmly sided with Raffles in the Raffles-Farquhar controversy – as would be confirmed by subsequent celebrations in Singapore over the years, of Raffles as the pre-eminent founding father of the Settlement. Meanwhile, Lady Raffles published a second edition of the *Memoir* in 1835.<sup>64</sup> The commemoration of Raffles in the durable form of books and monuments

---

<sup>61</sup> See the discussion of the *Memoir* in: C.N. Parkinson, "A Review of Charles Wurtzburg's 'Raffles of the Eastern Isles'." *The Malayan Historical Journal*, Volume 2, Number 1 (July 1955), pp. 59-60, and in John Bastin's Introduction to the 1991 Oxford University Press edition of the *Memoir*.

<sup>62</sup> *Singapore Chronicle*, 10 March 1831, p. 2, R0009223.

<sup>63</sup> *Singapore Chronicle*, 29 December 1831, p. 3, R0009223.

<sup>64</sup> See John Bastin's Introduction to the 1991 Oxford University Press edition of *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles* by Lady Raffles, p. xxx.



was well under way, starting with the *Memoir* and the marble statue with its inscribed pedestal in Westminster Abbey.

### **Educational Monuments to Raffles**

Meanwhile, the efforts begun in 1827 to establish a monument to Raffles had not materialised by the early 1830s, but mentions in the press show that it was still a topic of discussion. In 1829, a letter published in the *Singapore Chronicle* proposed that the money raised for a monument to Raffles should be devoted to the construction of a library on the Plain, to be called the *Raffles Library*, which would serve as a reading room, town hall, and ballroom, and might even include a billiard room! However, the editor of the *Singapore Chronicle* noted that, while a library would certainly be a fine monument to Raffles, the money in the fund had not been donated for a library, and if the funds were to be diverted from their original purpose, the editor felt that they should go to the Singapore Institution.<sup>65</sup>

One of the subscribers to the monument fund wrote a letter to the editor of the *Singapore Chronicle* that was published in April 1831; the letter indicated that the idea was still alive, even if no progress had been made on constructing a monument.<sup>66</sup> In September 1832, someone suggested that a stone bridge should be built in honour of the memory of Raffles, and that the bridge could be called *Raffles Bridge*; however, nothing seems to have resulted from this proposal.<sup>67</sup> Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir recalled that

---

<sup>65</sup> *Singapore Chronicle*, 12 March 1829, pp. 2-3, R0009222.

<sup>66</sup> *Singapore Chronicle*, 7 April 1831, pp. 2-3, R0009223.

<sup>67</sup> C.B. Buckley, *An Anecdotal History*, p. 225.

there was talk of placing a statue of Raffles in a garden in the area that became Raffles Place, but this proposal also did not materialise.<sup>68</sup>

Finally, in January 1836, the subscribers to the Raffles monument fund held a public meeting, in which they decided that the best way to commemorate the memory of Raffles was to allocate the accumulated funds to the completion of the Singapore Institution.<sup>69</sup> Raffles had personally established this Institution just before leaving Singapore in 1823,<sup>70</sup> but it was soon abandoned and allowed to decay into a ruin.<sup>71</sup> Thanks at least in part to this generous endowment from the Raffles monument fund (including funds contributed by Syed Omar, Syed Mohamed Habshy, Bawa Sah, and a number of Europeans), the Singapore Institution was finally completed and began to function as an important educational institution, which would eventually educate many of the leading people of Singapore.

When the Singapore Institution became known as Raffles Institution in 1868,<sup>72</sup> the story of the Raffles monument fund was finally complete, and the stately Palladian buildings of the Raffles Institution, situated near the waterfront and the Padang, served as a highly conspicuous public monument and landmark bearing Sir Stamford's name. For the remainder of the colonial era, Raffles Institution remained in its historic buildings on the original site, which had been personally chosen by Raffles in 1823. After Singapore entered its post-colonial era, the historic Raffles Institution buildings were demolished, but the *Raffles* name has continued its association with this location. Raffles City, a

---

<sup>68</sup> Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, *The Hikayat Abdullah: The Autobiography of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir (1797-1854)*, translated by A.H. Hill, p. 167.

<sup>69</sup> C.B. Buckley, *An Anecdotal History*, p. 129.

<sup>70</sup> For a first-hand account of the founding of the Singapore Institution by Raffles in 1823, see: Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, *The Hikayat Abdullah: The Autobiography of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir (1797-1854)*, translated by A.H. Hill, pp. 180-182.

<sup>71</sup> C.B. Buckley, *An Anecdotal History*, p. 127.

<sup>72</sup> Buckley, p. 139.

shopping centre and hotel complex designed by I.M. Pei & Partners, was constructed on this site in 1985. This aluminium-clad cylindrical high-rise structure, which was the world's highest hotel tower,<sup>73</sup> carried Sir Stamford's name into the twenty-first century, on the very spot where he proudly inaugurated his beloved Institution in 1823. The towering Raffles City could be viewed as a gigantic post-colonial monument in the ongoing commemoration of Raffles, a modern icon of his cult, and yet another example of the persistence and continuity of aspects of this cult over time. Like other monuments and celebrations of Raffles, Raffles City has contributed to the prestige and symbolic value of his name, and has helped to keep his name alive into the twenty-first century.

### **Routine Invocation of the Name of Raffles in Prestigious Contexts**

Documentary evidence shows that the custom of invoking the name of Raffles became routine in the Settlement of Singapore soon after he left this island for the last time in 1823. Such routine invocation must surely have invested his name with symbolic significance in the local context. The invocation of his name became especially customary with regard to the various celebrations of the anniversary of the founding of the Settlement. This event was established as an occasion worthy of celebration in Singapore in the 1820s, as already shown by the testimony of S.G. Bonham in 1826. Anniversary celebrations were held from time to time, throughout the colonial era; and these contributed to the consecration and further sanctification of the legendary name of Raffles in the elite public consciousness, endowing his name, and the rituals surrounding it, with symbolic significance to Asian and European elites.

The twentieth anniversary of the establishment of the Settlement by Raffles in 1819 was the occasion for a public ball and a banquet in February 1839. The report on

---

<sup>73</sup> Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*, p. 277.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

this event in the *Singapore Free Press* mentioned that Raffles hoisted the British flag at Singapore in 1819.<sup>74</sup> The twenty-fourth anniversary of the founding was commemorated by newly-formed Singapore Sporting Club of the first horse races at the new racecourse in February 1843,<sup>75</sup> thus beginning a tradition of horseracing which would attract the attention and participation of Asian and European elites for generations to come. The location of this historic racecourse is still commemorated to this day in the name of Racecourse Road. The Singapore Sporting Club flourished, and became the Singapore Turf Club in 1924.<sup>76</sup>

Raffles was also honoured in other prestigious contexts, besides the Settlement's anniversary celebrations. In November 1843, a group of local Scotsmen held a dinner in honour of St. Andrew's Day, which featured toasts to the memory of Raffles and St. Andrew, as well as Queen Victoria and other living people.<sup>77</sup> It was almost as though Raffles was made an honorary Scotsman! In 1845, there was a proposal to re-establish the Raffles Club,<sup>78</sup> but this does not seem to have happened. A newspaper report of a public meeting of Chinese and Europeans held in Singapore in 1850 indicates that the idea of building a monument to Raffles was *still* alive, and that some prominent residents wanted to build such a monument to Raffles at the landing-place at the intersection of Beach Road and High Street, as a way of commemorating the recent visit to Singapore of Lord Dalhousie, the Governor-General of India.<sup>79</sup> Although a group of Asian and

---

<sup>74</sup> C.B. Buckley, p. 334.

<sup>75</sup> Sumiko Tan, *The Winning Connection: 150 Years of Racing in Singapore*, p. 9; see also p. 18; C.B. Buckley, p. 387; *Singapore Free Press*, 2 March 1843, p. 3.

<sup>76</sup> *Malaya Tribune*, 17 April 1933, p. 12, R0005904.

<sup>77</sup> Buckley, pp. 398-399.

<sup>78</sup> Buckley, p. 439.

<sup>79</sup> Buckley, pp. 530-531.

European residents of Singapore built an obelisk in honour of Lord Dalhousie (which may still be seen today), the inscription on this monument does not mention Raffles.

### **The Thirty-Fifth Anniversary of the Settlement in 1854**

Governor Butterworth celebrated the thirty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of the Settlement by hosting a dance and a supper for a multiracial gathering in February 1854. This event took place in the Assembly Rooms, which were located at the base of Fort Canning Hill, at the corner of River Valley Road and Hill Street.<sup>80</sup> A report on this event, which was published in the *Illustrated London News*,<sup>81</sup> mentioned that there were Arab, Chinese, European, Jewish, Malay, Persian, and Siamese guests. At least some of the Asian guests wore distinctive and picturesque costumes, which were described at some length in the article.

A bust of Raffles (probably the same one which Lady Raffles sent to the Institution) was displayed in the ballroom, supported by a pillar and framed by the British ensign and the flag of the East India Company. Behind these were two sketches, one showing Singapore in 1819 and the other showing how it looked in 1854. The written description of the display of Sir Stamford's bust – together with the sketch published in the *Illustrated London News* – suggest that the display focused the attention of the guests on this likeness of Raffles. It must have been practically certain that those who attended this social function would have noticed the image of the founder on display, as if watching over them. The juxtaposition of the bust with the pictures showing Singapore

---

<sup>80</sup> Dato Sir Roland Braddell, "The Good Old Days," in: Makepeace et al., eds., *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume Two, pp. 486 and 497; F.J. Hallifax, "Municipal Government," in Makepeace et al., Volume One, p. 334.

<sup>81</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 22 April 1854, possibly on page 370. A clipping is in the Raffles Scrapbook, NUS Central Library Rare Books Collection Stack #R4091. This article was also reproduced in the book *Straits Affairs* by D.J.M. Tate, p. 48.

before and after the time of Raffles conveyed the message that Singapore had become what it was because of Raffles.

After a loyal toast to Queen Victoria, the Governor announced that a lighthouse which was about to be built in the harbour would be called Raffles Lighthouse. A merchant named John Purvis, who was described as the oldest merchant then residing in Singapore, spoke in praise of Raffles and the freedom of the port. John Purvis represented the continuity of a living link to Raffles: Purvis arrived in Singapore in 1822,<sup>82</sup> and Raffles appointed him one of twelve Magistrates of Singapore in 1823.<sup>83</sup> The fact that news of this particular ritual in the cult of Raffles managed to find its way to England and into the pages of the *Illustrated London News* indicates the success of the promoters of this cult in organising the event and attracting the interest of the public, including Asians and Europeans alike. By bringing them together on this occasion, public attention was focused on both the physical likeness of Raffles on display atop its pillar, and the mention of the legacy of Raffles by John Purvis, who witnessed the Settlement's early development when Raffles was still here.

### **Raffles Lighthouse**

The foundation stone of Raffles Lighthouse was dedicated on Queen Victoria's thirty-fifth birthday on 24 May 1854 – one of many examples of the association of the veneration of Raffles with the celebration of the monarchy in colonial Singapore, which could only have enhanced the prestige and symbolic value attached to Sir Stamford's name. This event, held on a tiny island southwest of Singapore, was attended by a large

---

<sup>82</sup> C.M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements 1826-67*, p. 27.

<sup>83</sup> C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 97; Sir Stamford Raffles, "Commission for the Magistracy" dated 6 June 1823, in: Lady Raffles, *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles* (1830), Appendix p. 61.

### *The Cult of Raffles*

congregation, including Governor Butterworth, other local officials and foreign consuls, local merchants and Freemasons, and the band of the Forty-Third Regiment of the Madras Native Infantry. The band played for the Governor and his guests as they proceeded to the island aboard the steamer *Hoogly*.

The Singapore Freemasons of the Lodge Zetland in the East performed the ceremony at the lighthouse site, with speeches by Governor Butterworth and by a prominent local British businessman named W.H. Read, in his capacity as the acting Worshipful Master of Lodge Zetland in the East. W.H. Read presided over an elaborate Masonic ritual at the foundation stone, which involved placing a document and some coins in a cavity in the foundation stone and covering the cavity with an inscribed plate, followed by the ceremonial testing of the stone with a plumb, a level, and a square, and the offerings of corn, wine, and oil as emblems of plenty, joy, and peace respectively. The solemn Masonic rituals must have imparted a sense of time-honoured dignity to the occasion, and further enshrined the venerated name of Raffles in the public consciousness, as a prestigious name worthy of respect and reverence.

The speeches by Butterworth and Read and the text of the inscription on the plate that was attached to the foundation stone were printed in full in the *Singapore Free Press*, together with the text of another inscription on a tablet in the visitor's room of the lighthouse.<sup>84</sup> The speeches and the inscription made it clear that this ceremony was a celebration of both Queen Victoria and Raffles – or, in other words, of both the institutions of the imperial monarchy and the cult of the founder of the Settlement, thus symbolically coupling these two institutions, both of which functioned to bring Asian and European elites together in the communion or shared consumption of public honours,

---

<sup>84</sup> C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, pp. 520-526, quoting the *Singapore Free Press*.

prestige, and social status. The inscriptions on the plate and the tablet both praised Raffles for his establishment of the free port policy, and the speeches emphasised the debt which the Settlement owed to its founder. W.H. Read's speech was especially fulsome in its praise of Raffles, and Read quoted an address given by Raffles when he founded the Singapore Institution. This ceremony may be seen as an example of one of the more elaborate rituals of the cult of Raffles.

### **Raffles and Royalty**

The celebrations of the anniversaries of Sir Stamford's founding of Singapore and Queen Victoria's birth were especially symbolically compatible, owing to the fact that they both occurred in the year 1819. It is likely that this fact would have been especially apparent to W.H. Read, the impresario of various local celebrations and a leading admirer of Raffles, since he was also born in 1819, on the day after Raffles founded the Settlement.<sup>85</sup> During the local celebrations of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887, an address read on behalf of Tunku Allum pointed out that his grandfather, Sultan Hussein, granted Raffles certain rights over Singapore in 1819.<sup>86</sup> A passage in Buckley's *Anecdotal History* also suggests that there may have been some attempt to imagine a special connection between Singapore and Queen Victoria due to the establishment of the Settlement in the year of the Queen's birth.<sup>87</sup> The celebration of Queen Victoria's birth throughout the Empire continued even after her death in 1901, since her birthday was transformed into Empire Day.<sup>88</sup> Whatever associations there may have been in the public

---

<sup>85</sup> C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 369.

<sup>86</sup> *Straits Times*, 6 July 1887, p. 8, R0011435.

<sup>87</sup> C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 788

<sup>88</sup> Jeffrey Richards, *Imperialism and Music: Britain 1876-1953*, pp. 164-165. Regarding Empire Day in Singapore, see: *Singapore Free Press*, 23 May 1908, p. 12, and 25 May 1908, p. 5, R0006075; *Singapore Free Press*, 3 February 1919, p. 1, R0006130; *Malaya Tribune*, 24 May 1937, p. 12, R0005944; Dr. Peter H.L. Wee, *From Farm and Kampong*, pp. 101, 113-114, 115, and 116.



## *The Cult of Raffles*

consciousness between the birthday of Queen Victoria and the founding of the Settlement by Raffles in the same year would only have further enhanced the association of Raffles with royalty.

The bust sent by Lady Raffles, as well as the Raffles Lighthouse (which was completed in 1855),<sup>89</sup> were early examples of monuments to Raffles in Singapore, which complemented the ritualised invocations of his name in the continuing endowment of his image with symbolic significance. The name of Raffles was prominently inscribed on the Singapore landscape in 1858, when Commercial Square was officially renamed Raffles Place,<sup>90</sup> thus associating the name of Raffles with the place which was already the centre for Asian and European business elites.<sup>91</sup> A stained glass window, featuring an inscription dedicated to the memory of Raffles and describing him as the founder of Singapore, was installed in St. Andrew's Cathedral by 1864.<sup>92</sup>

By the 1860s, it had apparently become normal and traditional for the name of Raffles to be invoked routinely in various contexts related to Singapore. For example, when *The Illustrated London News* reported on the opening ceremony of the Victoria Dock in Singapore, which took place on 17 October 1868, the report mentioned Raffles, his founding of Singapore, and his establishment of the principles of free trade here.<sup>93</sup> The names of *Raffles* and *Singapore* had evidently become closely linked in the public consciousness, at least of many *literate* people, just as Raffles was often associated with royal celebrations, with his name mentioned for one reason or another in the context of

---

<sup>89</sup> C.M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements*, p. 194.

<sup>90</sup> Buckley, p. 667.

<sup>91</sup> See, for example, the list of merchants in Commercial Square, listed in the 1846 edition of *The Straits Times Almanack, Calendar and Directory*, pp. 53-61, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0011768.

<sup>92</sup> John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India*, p. 69; Edwin Lee, *Historic Buildings*, p. 27.

<sup>93</sup> *The Illustrated London News*, 2 January 1869, p. 17, in the British Library, Colindale Avenue.

honouring royalty. In a sense, the institution of Raffles had been set alongside the institution of the imperial monarchy in the social and symbolic environment of Singapore. This elevation of Sir Stamford, the local hero and founding father, to near-royal status in Singapore, was the joint accomplishment of the Asian and European elites who took part together in the cult of Raffles.

### **The Celebration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Settlement in 1869**

Public celebrations provided occasions for the endowment of the legendary image of Raffles with rich symbolic significance, as well as the invocation of his name in association with the imperial monarchy. This was an important element of the colonial civil religion and the cult of Raffles, and such prestigious events could attract the interest and participation of Asian and European elites alike. One example was the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Settlement, which was celebrated in February 1869 with dancing and a banquet at the Town Hall, and sports on the Padang. The celebrations, which prompted several articles in the local press, were organised by a committee headed by W.H. Read, who was by this time a Legislative Councillor. The festivities at the Town Hall were attended by Governor Ord, Maharajah (later Sultan) Abu Bakar of Johore, Sir Benson Maxwell, military officers, and foreign consuls, as well as merchants and bankers. A bust of Raffles (once again, probably the one sent by Lady Raffles) was displayed inside the Town Hall on a seven-foot pedestal, in front of the flag of the Volunteer Rifles, while the Volunteers' Enfield rifles were stacked around the pedestal and two twelve-pounder mountain howitzers were displayed on each side. Also on display were the drums of the Volunteers, a tiger skin, and some Malay and Chinese

### *The Cult of Raffles*

weapons.<sup>94</sup> Perhaps these weapons were meant to show that the colonial system in Singapore (represented symbolically by Raffles) was supported by the combined strength of the Chinese, the Malays, and the Europeans; certainly, the elites of each of these sections of the population were partners in this colonial system.

While it might be debatable as to just what sort of message was supposed to be conveyed by the display of all those Asian and European weapons, it seems likely that, if nothing else, these interesting exhibits helped to draw the attention of everyone in attendance towards the bust of Raffles. Indeed, the detailed account of these exhibits that was published in the *Straits Times* would suggest that the article writer's interest was attracted to the display. Spectacle and display could foster the public recognition of certain symbols as important and prestigious, and worthy of attention and veneration. The cult of Raffles employed spectacle and display to endow the founder's name with iconic status and symbolic value in the shared consciousness of the members of the multiracial elite class.

Once again, W.H. Read played a leading role in the celebration of Raffles and royalty. Read proposed a toast to Queen Victoria at the close of the supper, and after the band played the National Anthem, he spoke briefly about Raffles and his establishment of Singapore a half century earlier, before proposing a toast to the Governor's health. Governor Ord gave his own speech, which also mentioned Raffles and his founding of Singapore, and included a quotation from a letter which Raffles wrote shortly before arriving on this island.<sup>95</sup> Another article in the *Straits Times* regarding the celebrations in 1869 referred to the importance of the free trade policy for Singapore, a policy which was

---

<sup>94</sup> *Straits Times Overland Journal*, 16 February 1869, pp. 2-3, R0006767.

<sup>95</sup> *Straits Times Overland Journal*, 16 February 1869, pp. 2-3, R0006767.

established by Raffles.<sup>96</sup> Clearly, this anniversary celebration was as much a celebration of Raffles as it was of Singapore.

The memory of Raffles was very much alive during this event, which may be seen as another example of the celebration of Raffles as a form of colonial civil religion, in which elites praised Raffles as a legendary figure, associated him with the Crown and the Empire, and associated themselves with his image, thus confirming their own prestige and status, and legitimating the colonial system and the free trade policy. The memory of Raffles lived on because local elites kept it alive and elevated his name to the status of a local heroic legend. The cult of Raffles brought the members of the multiracial elite class together in prestigious interaction, giving them not only an imperial hero whose image they could venerate together, but also a system of colonial status symbols which they could share, consuming these symbolic goods together in a communion of prestige. When the Asian elites joined their Western fellow elites in publicly venerating Raffles, they thereby celebrated themselves, their elite status and membership in the community of colonial elites, as well as the ideologies that facilitated their success within the colonial system, especially the ideologies of free trade, equality before the law, and imperial authority – the concepts which were associated with his image in public memory by the civil religion or cult of Raffles.

### **The Apotheosis of Raffles in Bronze**

The commemoration of Raffles finally produced its most iconic image, when a bronze statue was dedicated in his memory. The statue was unveiled by Governor Sir Frederick Weld during Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887.<sup>97</sup> This statue stood on

---

<sup>96</sup> *Straits Times Overland Journal*, 19 January 1869, p. 2, R0006767.

<sup>97</sup> *Straits Times* (weekly issue), 6 July 1887, p. 7, NUS microfilm reel R0011435.

the Padang until 1919, when it was moved to Victoria Memorial Hall at Empress Place. In this new location, the statue was enshrined in a semi-circular classical colonnade, which framed the image of Raffles, much as ancient Greek temples once enclosed the statues of gods.<sup>98</sup> The ceremonial unveiling of the statue in 1887, and its rededication during the centennial in 1919, both involved the participation of Asian elites.

The symbolic value of the statue of Raffles is suggested by the way in which the Japanese treated it during their wartime occupation of Singapore, from 1942 to 1945. Even the Japanese invaders seem to have been impressed with the statue after they conquered Singapore in 1942, if only as a prestigious trophy of war. Although the Japanese destroyed the colonnade,<sup>99</sup> they had the statue moved to Raffles Museum, where it was prominently displayed in the entrance hall for the rest of the Japanese occupation of Singapore, which they renamed *Syonan-to*. The Japanese even labelled the statue with a sign – written in Japanese, Malay, and English – which described Raffles as *the founder of Syonan-to!* According to E.J.H. Corner, groups of Japanese soldiers and sailors – including their officers – visited the museum almost every day, where they honoured the statue by giving it three cheers.<sup>100</sup> The honouring of the statue by the Japanese suggests that the Asian and European elites of colonial Singapore had so successfully invested the name and image of Raffles with symbolic value and built up the *Raffles* brand that even the Japanese invaders were tempted to put this symbol to use for their own purposes, by giving their newly-conquered colony of *Syonan-to* an historic past with an heroic founding father, even though he was a European. Thus, the Japanese

---

<sup>98</sup> For descriptions of the colonnade, see the *Straits Times*, 7 February 1919, p. 10, NUS microfilm reel R0016569, and: Ambrose Pratt, *Magical Malaya* (1931), p. 25.

<sup>99</sup> O.W. Gilmour, *With Freedom to Singapore*, p. 113.

<sup>100</sup> E.J.H. Corner, *The Marquis: A Tale of Syonan-to*, pp. 118-119.

### *The Cult of Raffles*

retained Raffles in the officially-sanctioned past of Syonan-to, much as the British retained Sang Nila Utama in their conception of the pre-colonial past of this island. Japan was defeated in 1945, and the statue was ceremonially restored to its pre-war site at Empress Place on Sir Stamford's birthday in 1946,<sup>101</sup> where it still stands today.

The symbolic capital and sense of centrality which the statue bestowed upon the iconic image and public memory of Raffles was magnified by the fact that it was the *only* important secular public statue of a person anywhere colonial Singapore.<sup>102</sup> (The statue of Queen Victoria, presented by local Chinese elites and unveiled in 1889, was placed *inside* Government House, where it could only be seen by the invited guests of successive Governors.) The statue of Raffles remained the only important secular public statue of a human being in Singapore throughout the colonial era. Indeed, the continuing symbolic importance of the statue was confirmed by the fact that, after Singapore became an independent republic, the statue was preserved in its prominent location at Empress Place, and a white replica of the statue was unveiled only a short distance away, near the river. When Singapore entered the twenty-first century, there were only two important secular statues depicting historical figures of Singapore, and both of these statues represented the same man: Sir Stamford Raffles. The symbolic significance of his name has been perpetuated in the independent Republic of Singapore by the establishment in more recent years of Raffles Country Club, Raffles Marina, Raffles Town Club, and Raffles Hospital.

In a sense, Raffles was honoured in terms of the physical environment here even more than royalty: while a number of public places were named after royalty (such as

---

<sup>101</sup> Gilmour, *With Freedom to Singapore*, p. 204; Corner, *The Marquis*, p. 119.

<sup>102</sup> Compare with the discussion of the equestrian statue of King Chulalongkorn of Siam, in: Maurizio Peleggi, *Lords of Things*, p. 109.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

Empress Place, Connaught Drive, Prince Edward Road, and Kent Ridge), as well as the King Edward VII College of Medicine, Raffles was commemorated not only in the naming of some of the most important places after him (such as Raffles Place, Raffles Quay, Stamford Road, and Raffles Lighthouse) and in the names of Raffles Institution, Raffles Girls' School, Raffles Hotel, and Raffles College, but also by the dedication of the only important secular statue in a public place, aside from the bronze elephant dedicated in 1872 in honour of the visit to Singapore of King Chulalongkorn of Siam in 1871.<sup>103</sup> While Hong Kong had a statue of Queen Victoria in its Statue Square,<sup>104</sup> the focus of attention in Empress Place in Singapore was the statue of Raffles, much as the statue of Lord Nelson atop its column is the monumental focal point of Trafalgar Square in London. Perhaps the especially conspicuous role of Raffles-related imagery was due to the fact that the Raffles legend occupied such a central role in the local heritage of Singapore, and most especially the heritage of the local elite class and its institutions, traditions, and ideology.

The uniqueness of the statue in the local context asserted that Raffles was not merely one of the founding fathers of the Settlement – but rather, that he was, in a sense, *the father of the founding fathers* of colonial Singapore. The local uniqueness of this statue during the colonial era enhanced the distinctiveness of the name of Raffles as a

---

<sup>103</sup> Regarding the bronze elephant, see: Major-General Sir Archibald Edward Harbord Anson, K.C.M.G., *About Others and Myself 1745 to 1920*, p. 302; T.J. Keaughran, *Picturesque and Busy Singapore*, p. 12; J.S.M. Rennie, *Musings of J.S.M.R. Mostly Malayan*, p. 148; Dato Sir Roland Braddell, "The Good Old Days," in: Makepeace *et al.*, eds., *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume Two, p. 520. The elephant statue stood in front of the Town Hall (later the Victoria Memorial Hall) from 1872 until 1919, when it was moved to the Supreme Court building (later the Parliament House) and its original place was taken by the Raffles Statue, which was moved there from the Padang. See: Anson, *About Others and Myself*, p. 302; Rennie, *Musings*, p. 148; *Malaya Tribune*, 7 February 1919, p. 4; Braddell, "The Good Old Days," p. 520; Arnold Wright and Thomas H. Reid, *The Malay Peninsula: A Record of British Progress in the Middle East*, p. 224; Denis Santry and Claude, *Salubrious Singapore*, pp. 46-47; *British Malaya* magazine, September 1949, p. 307.

<sup>104</sup> Jan Morris, *Hong Kong*, p. 41.

form of symbolic capital, a label which elites could attach to themselves, to one another, and to their institutions, street addresses, and public rituals of prestige, as a brand name of status and distinction, conferring prestige on Asian and European elites alike. The cult of Raffles and the colonial civil religion of the imperial monarchy were the twin pillars at the centre of the local system of colonial status symbols in the Settlement of Singapore.

### **The Hagiography of the Local Hero**

The public celebrations and commemorations of Raffles were paralleled by the honouring of Raffles in print, both in local publications as well as in works published in Britain. These publications were *written* monuments to Raffles; they exalted and sustained the legendary status of Raffles over time, while allowing for the leading elites of succeeding generations to be associated in print with the legend of the departed founding father. In a sense, publications could serve as genealogies, which traced the lines of what might be regarded as spiritual or imagined descent from living elites, back through previous generations of deceased elites and their institutions, to the founding father himself. Through these publications, succeeding generations of elites could assert that they were, in fact, the rightful heirs of Sir Stamford's legacy, including the sacred free trade tradition and the heritage of inclusion of different types of elites (official and unofficial, Asian and European) in the local colonial social and political structure that was conceived at least in part by Raffles. These publications defined the membership of the distinguished fraternity of the followers and spiritual descendants of Raffles. The appearance of Sir Stamford's name in print, year after year, helped to keep his spirit alive in the public consciousness in Singapore, at least among the English-literate section of the population.



### *The Cult of Raffles*

Besides the public rituals and monumental memorials which asserted the heroic image of Raffles, Asian and European elites also exalted his name in spoken and written texts – in public speeches, newspaper articles, historical accounts, memoirs, guidebooks, annual directories, and local who's who books. These *texts* reminded their audiences of Sir Stamford's role as the local hero and champion of free trade, equal legal rights for all races, respect of property rights, and Western-style education for Asian elites. These publications not only celebrated Raffles and enhanced the prestige of his name, but they also provided Asian and European elites with opportunities to associate themselves, their institutions, and their ideologies with Raffles, and to see themselves and portray themselves to others as the heirs of the prestigious tradition and heritage of the founder of the Settlement of Singapore. By this means, the elites associated themselves with one another, and thereby asserted their membership in a cosmopolitan community of elites, and, by doing so, they imagined the existence and social reality of their class as a community of prestige.

Many of the elites here were immigrants or migrants who could not claim an ancestral connection with Singapore; however, by associating themselves with Raffles, with the ideologies of free trade, property rights, and legal equality which were associated with Raffles, and with the organisations and institutions which traced their lineage to him, even those elites who had recently arrived in Singapore could claim to be clothed in an aura of prestigious heritage and tradition, which affirmed their elite status and their membership in the community of elites. This process may be compared with the desire of socially-ambitious individuals to assert their descent from a noble lineage by

engaging in genealogical research in the hopes of discovering prestigious ancestors.<sup>105</sup>

As Kwa Chong Guan has explained, the depiction of Raffles as the *great man* in the history of Singapore went hand-in-hand with the celebration by the leading local Asians and Europeans of the colonial port Settlement, which claimed Raffles as its founder.<sup>106</sup>

Publications brought together the public memory of past and contemporary elites with the legend and iconic image of Raffles. For example, the book *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya*, edited by Arnold Wright and H.A. Cartwright and published in 1908, featured a section on Raffles, as well as biographical sketches of some of the leading Asian elites in Singapore at that time, such as Goh Siew Tin, Tan Boo Liat, Nissim Nissim Adis, Tan Jiak Kim, Dr. Lim Boon Keng, Tan Keong Saik, and Tan Kah Kee,<sup>107</sup> together with their European fellow elites, including Governor Sir John Anderson and Rowland Allen of Allen and Gledhill. Local commemorative history books and guidebooks contained references to Raffles and his founding of the Settlement of Singapore, as well as his establishment of the free port policy. These books also provided information on the Asian and European elites who were active at the time of publication, and the local history books featured biographical sketches of the leading Asian and European elites from the time of Raffles to the time of publication. In these ways, such books linked Asian and European elites together to one another as a class, and back through their predecessors and their institutions and traditions all the way to Raffles

---

<sup>105</sup> Regarding genealogical research, see: Eric Hobsbawm, "Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914," in: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, editors, *The Invention of Tradition*, pp. 292-293; C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, pp. 50-53; and: Gabriel A. Almond, *Plutocracy and Politics in New York City*, p. 123.

<sup>106</sup> Kwa Chong Guan, "From Temasek to Singapore: Locating a Global City-State in the Cycles of Melaka Straits History," in: John N. Miksic and Cheryl-Ann Low Mei Gek, general editors, *Early Singapore 1300s – 1819: Evidence in Maps, Text and Artefacts*, p. 137.

<sup>107</sup> Arnold Wright and H.A. Cartwright, editors, *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya* (1908), pp. 18-34, 123-124, 177, 574, 611, 628, 631, 633, 640, and 712.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

himself, the founding father, and the important policies regarding the freedom of the port and the legal and educational systems, which were traditionally attributed to his genius and vision. By means of such publications, these elites celebrated their own sense of community as a multiracial elite class through honouring the memory of Raffles in printed words, just as they did in public rituals and speeches.

Local guidebooks and histories initiated new elites into the mysteries and heritage of the cosmopolitan elite class, and shaped their attitudes and perceptions, by making available to them a particular type of knowledge about the past of their class, including its membership and traditions, its institutions and practices, and its rituals and ideologies.<sup>108</sup> While these books ostensibly provided information about the history of Singapore or Malaya in general, or at least about the histories of particular racial groups, they were, in fact, mainly concerned about elites – especially Chinese and European elites – and presented views of Singapore and Malaya from an elite-centred perspective. The new elites who could read these works as part of the process of initiation and integration into the elite class, were *new* in the sense that they had just arrived in Singapore, or had just been promoted to an important position, or that they had been born here and might read these books as they grew into adulthood as well as into full membership in the elite class. A few mentions in memoirs and colonial-era periodicals suggest that such guidebooks and local histories were widely read in Singapore, and were regarded as important works of reference.<sup>109</sup> This suggests that the information contained in these books could have had a significant impact upon the activities and interactions of elites, and in the creation

---

<sup>108</sup> See: John Carroll, *Edge of Empires*, pp. 80-83, and 176-180.

<sup>109</sup> Yap Pheng Geck, *Scholar, Banker, Gentleman Soldier*, pp. 59 and 64; Edwin Arthur Brown, *Indiscreet Memories*, pp. 168-169; George Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, pp. 10 and 12; *British Malaya* (magazine), December 1931, p. 232, and July 1937, p. 59; *Malaya* (magazine), February 1955, pp. 26-27.

### *The Cult of Raffles*

and continuity of new local traditions. The ways in which Asian and European elites viewed themselves, their social status, and their class membership were likely shaped in large part by these publications.

By assimilating the lore of the elite class as chronicled in these books, new elites were shown how they could succeed to the leadership roles of the elites of earlier generations – how they could, in effect, become the adopted heirs of the elites who were prominent in Singapore before them. John Carroll has explained how guidebooks in Hong Kong identified Chinese elites there, and provided examples for aspiring elites to follow, showing them the standards, activities, and organisations by means of which they, too, could become recognised as elites;<sup>110</sup> certain publications in colonial Singapore likely functioned in the same way for Asian and European elites here. These publications included books by Sir Ong Siang Song, Charles Burton Buckley, Arnold Wright and H.A. Cartwright, Walter Makepeace *et al.*, and F.M. Luscombe, as well as the annual directories and local who's who books. These books listed the prestigious institutions and activities, especially those of a public-spirited and charitable nature, by means of which individuals could distinguish themselves as the leading people of their community, and gain honours conferred by prestigious institutions, especially the Crown and the Governor, who represented the Crown in Singapore. This process of the initiation and inclusion of new elites was especially important because the elite class was mainly defined by achieved status, although there were some prominent examples of hereditary succession to the upper levels of this elite class.

It cannot be denied that the local elite class featured an element of hereditary prestige, as several local families succeeded in holding high status over the course of

---

<sup>110</sup> John M. Carroll, *Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonialists in Hong Kong*, pp. 81-83.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

several generations during the colonial era, including the descendants of Seah Eu Chin,<sup>111</sup> Tan Kim Seng,<sup>112</sup> Tan Tock Seng,<sup>113</sup> and Wong Ah Fook.<sup>114</sup> Although the family of the Honourable Legislative Councillor Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa, CMG, declined in wealth over the years, members of this family still retained high status for some time.<sup>115</sup> Other distinguished Asian families, which succeeded in retaining their prominence in colonial Singapore over the course of several generations, included the Aljunied, Alkaff, Alsagoff, Angullia, D'Almeida, and de Silva families, as well as, of course, the very wealthy family of the Temenggongs and Sultans of Johore in the line of Temenggong Abdul Rahman. Important European families in colonial Singapore included the Read, Guthrie, Braddell, and Shelford families. It was not unusual for family-owned businesses and estates to pass from one generation to another.

Still, hereditary or dynastic succession to ascribed status as leading elites may have been the exception which proved the rule. Among the Chinese in colonial Singapore, it was proverbial that wealthy families rarely managed to maintain their wealth for more than three generations.<sup>116</sup> J. de Vere Allen noted that officials of the

---

<sup>111</sup> See the entry on Seah Eu Chin, J.P., and his descendants, in: Arnold Wright and H.A. Cartwright, editors, *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya* (1908), p. 634. See also: "Ngee Ann Kongsi (Incorporation) Ordinance," in: *The Laws of the Straits Settlements Edition of 1936. In Five Volumes*. Singapore: Government Printing Office, Singapore, 1936, Volume V, Chapter 258, pp. 724-747.

<sup>112</sup> See the entry on the Honourable Legislative Councillor Tan Jiak Kim, J.P., a grandson of Tan Kim Seng, in: Arnold Wright and H.A. Cartwright, editors, *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya* (1908), pp. 631-632. This entry also includes information on Tan Kim Seng and his sons, Tan Beng Swee, J.P., and Tan Beng Gum.

<sup>113</sup> C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, pp. 7 and 18; and the paragraph about Tan Tock Seng's grandson, Tan Bin Cheng, in: Arnold Wright and H.A. Cartwright, editors, *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya* (1908), p. 635

<sup>114</sup> Datin Patricia Lim Pui Huen, *Wong Ah Fook: Immigrant, Builder and Entrepreneur*.

<sup>115</sup> Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, p. 187. Twenty-eight years after the death of Ho Ah Kay Whampoa in 1880, an entry on Ho Ah Kay Whampoa and his family was included among the most prominent Chinese of Singapore in a book about British Malaya published in London in 1908; see: Arnold Wright and H.A. Cartwright, editors, *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya* (1908), p. 634.

<sup>116</sup> Wang Gungwu, "The Culture of Chinese Merchants," in: *China and the Chinese Overseas*, p. 192; and: Edwin Lee, "Community, Family, and Household," in: Ernest C. T. Chew and Edwin Lee, editors, *A History of Singapore*, p. 251.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

Malayan Civil Service were rarely followed into the service by their sons.<sup>117</sup> Dato Sir Roland St. John Braddell remarked that he believed that he would be the last of the Braddells in Singapore.<sup>118</sup> The image of the elite class here seems to have been characterised more by an image of achievement than by ascribed or hereditary status; this image of achievement in terms of economic and social mobility was fostered by tales of immigrants who arrived in Singapore with little or no money, but who nevertheless managed to acquire a remarkable degree of wealth and status through their own efforts. Examples of such life stories of remarkable personal achievement may be found in Sir Ong Siang Song's book, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, which was published in 1923.<sup>119</sup>

The life story of Raffles – as depicted in various books – reinforced the idea of the elite class as a class that was open to achievement, rather than limited exclusively to high-born individuals. Raffles had only limited formal education, and went to work as a clerk when he was a teenager. Yet, he managed to achieve prominence, and to find a place in the history books as a leading Empire-builder. The legendary image of Raffles depicted in various colonial-era publications provided an example for ambitious Asians and Europeans in Singapore and Malaya to emulate. For example, R.D. Pringle's book, *A Brief Life of Sir Stamford Raffles: The Founder of Singapore*, was published in Singapore in 1918 and dedicated to young readers.

---

<sup>117</sup> J. de Vere Allen, "Malayan Civil Service, 1874-1941: Colonial Bureaucracy / Malayan Elite," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Volume 12, Issue 2, April 1970, p. 169.

<sup>118</sup> Dato Sir Roland St. John Braddell, *The Lights of Singapore*, p. 203.

<sup>119</sup> See, for example, the reference to Tan Tock Seng on p. 66, Foo Teng Quee on p. 96, Khoo Cheng Tiong on pp. 100-101, Gan Eng Seng on p. 273, Wong Ah Shak on p. 288, Teo Hoo Lye on p. 350, Ng Sing Phang on p. 424, and Loke Yew on p. 540. See also: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power*, p. 7.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

The presentation of the life of Raffles as an example worthy of emulation may be compared with the development in the United States of the legendary life-story of Abraham Lincoln, a life-story which began in a log cabin.<sup>120</sup> The Lincoln legend in the United States – like the Raffles legend in Singapore – represented the elite classes of these places respectively as classes that were open to the upward social mobility of talented individuals from obscure backgrounds. The Lincoln legend may have inspired ambitious Americans to strive for success – if Abe Lincoln could rise from obscurity to the presidency, then, presumably, the American elite class was theoretically open to talented individuals. Likewise, if Raffles could achieve prominence despite his obscure origins, it would suggest that other people of humble backgrounds could also aspire to become heroes of the Empire. This message was implicit in the accounts of the life of Raffles that were written and read by English-speaking elites in Singapore, such as Charles Burton Buckley's *Anecdotal History*, published in 1902, and the account of the life of Raffles written by the Reverend William Cross which is the second chapter of *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, edited by Walter Makepeace *et al.* and published in 1921.

The celebration of Raffles as a theme in the social history of colonial Singapore was crucial to the self-representation of the cosmopolitan elite class as a class of achievement. The various celebrations of Raffles throughout the colonial era must have contributed to a public perception that the elite class was not closed to talented aspirants, a perception which seems to have been shared by so many ambitious upwardly-mobile

---

<sup>120</sup> See: W. Lloyd Warner, *The Family of God: A Symbolic Study of Christian Life in America*, pp. 249-250; and: E. Digby Baltzell with Howard G. Schneiderman, "Social Class in the Oval Office," in: E. Digby Baltzell, *The Protestant Establishment Revisited*, pp. 246-248 and 254.

Asian businessmen.<sup>121</sup> The multiracial elite class of colonial Singapore was publicly represented as a class of achieved status as much as – if not more than – ascribed status. The Raffles legend promoted the institutionalisation of the recruitment of new talent into the cosmopolitan elite class, a crucial factor in the reproduction of this class and its institutions and social structure over the course of the fourteen decades of the colonial era in Singapore, from 1819 to 1959.

Since the elite class here was largely an elite of achieved status,<sup>122</sup> as opposed to an hereditary aristocracy of ascribed status,<sup>123</sup> the members of this elite community could not base the identity or cohesion of their class primarily upon noble lineages and kinship. However, they could associate themselves with – and, in a sense, claim descent from – a fictive lineage traced back to Raffles, through all the generations of businessmen and officials who followed him to Singapore and were commemorated in the local historical accounts by Sir Ong Siang Song, Charles Burton Buckley, W. Feldwick, Arnold Wright and H.A. Cartwright, Walter Makepeace *et al.*, and F.M. Luscombe. New elites could become, in a sense, the adopted kinsmen and successors of earlier generations of local elites, by participating in the prestigious institutions and following the time-honoured traditions of the elite class, as recorded and explained in these books. It was an elite lineage of prestige, linking together Asian and European elites of different generations across time through shared heritage, tradition, and symbolic capital, rather than by

---

<sup>121</sup> Regarding rags-to-riches stories, see, for example, the references to the following self-made men in Sir Ong Siang Song's book *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*: Tan Tock Seng on p. 66, Foo Teng Quee on p. 96, Khoo Cheng Tiong on pp. 100-101, Gan Eng Seng on p. 273, Wong Ah Shak on p. 288, Teo Hoo Lye on p. 350, Ng Sing Phang on p. 424, and Loke Yew on p. 540. See also: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power*, p. 7.

<sup>122</sup> C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, p. 7.

<sup>123</sup> See the discussion of the difference between ascribed and achieved status, in: E. Digby Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class*, pp. 6-7, 9, 25-28, 32, 34, 38, 345, and 348; and: E. Digby Baltzell, *Sporting Gentlemen: Men's Tennis from the Age of Honor to the Cult of the Superstar*, pp. 35-36.



biological descent. This lineage connected generation after generation of elites all the way back to Raffles, who became to the elite class what Alexander the Great was to Malay royalty<sup>124</sup> – a legendary original ancestor whose name conferred prestige on all who could claim descent from him or connect themselves with him in some fashion.

Local historical accounts promoted elite-centred narratives of the development of Singapore as a thriving free port. According to these accounts, colonial Singapore was largely the creation of a procession of Asian and European elites. These narratives accorded prominence to Raffles in the early history of the Settlement, as well as to the subsequent activities and cooperative interactions of prominent Asian and European elites. The annual local directories listed the names of the government officials and the officers of important companies and other prestigious organisations in each year, beginning with the publication of the first local directory in 1846.<sup>125</sup> The local newspapers, which were largely devoted to chronicling the activities of the Asian and European elites, also reminded their readers from time to time that Raffles founded the Settlement and established Singapore as a free port, especially on the occasions of the observance of the founding of the Settlement by Raffles.<sup>126</sup> The 1918 and 1939 editions of *Who's Who in Malaya* provided lists of the names of various important colonial

---

<sup>124</sup> Anthony Milner, *Kerajaan*, pp. 5, 72, 81, 83, and 96.

<sup>125</sup> For the earliest Singapore annual directories, see the NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0011768, also labelled NL2363, containing *The Straits Times Almanack, Calendar and Directory* for the years 1846 and 1847, p. 3; and *The Singapore Almanack and Directory* for the years 1848, 1849, 1850, 1851, and 1852.

<sup>126</sup> Regarding reminders of Raffles in local newspapers, see: the *Singapore Chronicle*, 21 July 1825, quoted in: *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British India and its Dependencies*, Vol. XXI, No. 124, April 1826, pp. 529-530, British Library shelfmark ST 76; *Singapore Chronicle*, 7 April 1831, pp. 2-3; 9 June 1831, p. 3; 29 December 1831, p. 3; NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0009223; *Singapore Free Press*, 5 April 1860 p. 3, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0006023; *Straits Times Overland Journal*, 19 January 1869, pp. 1 and 2, and 16 February 1869, pp. 1, 2, 3, and 4; R0006767; *Straits Times*, 6 February 1885, p. 2, R0016433; *Straits Times* (weekly issue), 29 June 1887, p. 7, and 6 July 1887, p. 7, R0011435; *Straits Times*, 7 February 1919 p. 8, R0016569.

officials – lists which, in the case of Singapore, began with the name of Raffles<sup>127</sup> – as well as providing short biographical sketches of selected Asian and European elites.

Asian and European elites were associated with each other in the pages of printed publications, much as they associated with one another in person during public celebrations, civic rituals, and social functions. Commemorative books and guidebooks (for example, those by Sir Ong Siang Song, Buckley, Feldwick, Wright and Cartwright, and Makepeace *et al.*) routinely provided brief sketches of the life and career of Raffles, as well as mentioning the leading local elites at the time of publication of each volume. In this way, Asian and European elites were associated in print with one another, as well as with the heritage of Raffles and their other local colonial elite predecessors. Local annual directories, local newspapers, and who's who books showed which Asians and Europeans held prestigious titles within the local hierarchy of the colonial state, such as *Legislative Councillor*, *Municipal Commissioner*, and *Justice of the Peace*, as well as seats on the Advisory Boards and leadership positions in important local companies, associations, and clubs.

The appearance of the names of individual elites in Chinese-language and English-language newspapers, as well as in English-language directories, guidebooks, historical accounts, and who's who books, was a way for the elites to *keep score* of their success in the *social game*.<sup>128</sup> Newspapers and other publications, as well as public

---

<sup>127</sup> J.W. Dossett, *Who's Who in Malaya 1918*, p. 122; Julius S. Fisher, *Who's Who in Malaya 1939*, p. 3.

<sup>128</sup> The concepts of the *social game* and of *keeping score* in the newspapers have been explained in: Norton E. Long, "The Local Community as an Ecology of Games," in: *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (November 1958), pp. 251-261. Regarding the concept of a *social game*, see also: E. Digby Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class*, pp. 11-12; Peter Burke, *The Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society in Italy*, p. 194; David Silverman, *The Theory of Organisations: A Sociological Framework*, pp. 210-212; and: Harvey Warren Zorbaugh, *The Gold Coast and the Slum: A Sociological Study of Chicago's Near North Side*, pp. 49-64 and 279. See also the mention of the *game of honour* in: Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, p. 22.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

performances, were powerful and useful to the elite class, not only because they selectively presented certain information, but also because these publications could enhance or reduce the prestige of individuals and institutions, by praising and honouring, or by ignoring them; moreover, publications and events publicly associated certain people with one another,<sup>129</sup> by listing their names together in newspaper reports on events and meetings, in entries in the annual local directories which listed office holders and members of committees, and in local commemorative history books. Publications and events, as well as the images and traditions they propagated, were, along with the institutional network, the tools and media of the exchange of symbolic capital which socially bonded Asian and European elites into a cosmopolitan elite community. Asian and European elite shared an interest in the same social game; as they participated in this game, they recognised one another as fellow members of the elite class and as belonging to the same social space at the centre of society. By playing this game together, generation after generation, they built and sustained the social structure of their multiracial elite class as a community of prestige.<sup>130</sup>

The cult of Raffles created valuable symbolic goods and made them available to members of the multiracial elite class. The shared consumption or communion of these resources by these elites promoted the integration of their class and imparted a sense of social reality to their community of prestige. The celebration of Raffles through the creation and enhancement of prestigious imagery, connected with the tradition and

---

<sup>129</sup> See: Hans Speier. "Honor and Social Structure." *Social Research: An International Quarterly of Political and Social Science*. Volume Two, Number One, February 1935, p. 77.

<sup>130</sup> See: Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power," in: *Sociological Theory*, Volume 7, Number 1 (Spring 1989), p. 23; Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, p. 135; and: Pierre Bourdieu, "What Makes a Social Class? On The Theoretical and Practical Existence Of Groups," in: *Berkeley Journal of Sociology: A Critical Review*, Volume XXXII, 1987, p. 15.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

heritage of Raffles, and the depiction of his foresight or vision, as well as his Weberian personal charisma, asserted and enriched the prestige value or symbolic capital of connections or associations with the name and mythic legend of Raffles. Asian and European elites celebrated Raffles, and gained prestige through their association with his name and legend, in much the same way that they celebrated the monarchy and gained prestige through association with royalty.

We can gain some sense of the importance that Asian elites attached to their associations with the Raffles legend by the fact that so many published biographical sketches of Asian elites mention that they attended Raffles Institution, as well as the fact that they flocked to participate in the centenary celebrations of Sir Stamford's founding of the Settlement. Similarly, we can gain some sense of the prestige that is *still* attached to Sir Stamford's surname in the early twenty-first century by the fact that a recent edition of the Singapore telephone directory lists no less than seventy-four businesses or other organisations with the word *Raffles* in their names,<sup>131</sup> including a Raffles Town Club, a Raffles Hospital, a Raffles City, a Raffles Country Club, and a Raffles Marina, each of which was established long *after* the conclusion of the colonial era. The public celebration and commemoration of Raffles with public rituals (including at least four rituals involving his statue<sup>132</sup>) and the attachment of his name to buildings, streets, institutions, and places in Singapore, resembled the traditional celebration of monarchs. Asian and European elites cooperated in building up symbols and traditions, and gained prestige by associating themselves with these symbolic resources.

---

<sup>131</sup> *Singapore Phone Book Business Listings 2005 / 2006*, pp. 654-656.

<sup>132</sup> In 1887, 1919, 1922, and 1946.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

The celebrations of Raffles and the centenary of the Settlement of Singapore in 1919 were visible to the public, as well as reported in the local newspapers – in the Chinese-language *Chin Nam Poh*,<sup>133</sup> *Lat Pau*,<sup>134</sup> and *Kok Min Jit Poh*<sup>135</sup> newspapers, as well as the local English-language press, such as the *Singapore Free Press*, the *Straits Times*, and the *Malaya Tribune*. These events brought Asian elites and European elites together and reduced the social distance between them by allowing them to recognise their mutual elite status; as they recognised one another's elite rank and enjoyed the publicity which conspicuous celebrations gave to their prominent position in society, they affirmed their location together in the same elite social space, in a community of prestige at the centre of the colonial society. The name of Raffles became a special mark of distinction, connected with institutions and individuals at the exemplary centre of this multiracial society. The more prestige was attached to his name, the more symbolically valuable it was for Asian and European elites to participate and be included in institutions and events connected with Raffles – for example, the unveiling ceremonies for the statue of Raffles in 1887 and 1919.

Local publications served as instruction manuals for elite class membership. Through the local reference books, such as the annual local directories, the *Who's Who of Malaya*, and the books by Sir Ong Siang Song, Charles Burton Buckley, and Walter Makepeace *et al.* (to name just a few), new Asian and European members of the elite class learned how to fit into this class and its prestigious institutions and rituals, by

---

<sup>133</sup> *Chin Nam Poh*, 24 February 1919, p. 8, NUS Central Library ZR 00066 – list of businessmen who donated funds for the centenary celebration.

<sup>134</sup> *Lat Pau*, 22 February 1919, p. 3, ZR 00777 – list of donors.

<sup>135</sup> *Kok Min Jit Poh*, 7 February 1919, p. 6 (description of public celebrations), and 22 February 1919, p. 6 (list of donors), ZR 00676.

stepping into the shoes of their predecessors.<sup>136</sup> These books taught new elites about the importance of defending the sanctity of the free port policy and showed them how this policy was associated with the Empire, thanks to the personal intercession of Raffles, within whom were united the roles of creator, prophet, and guardian angel of the Settlement of Singapore and, especially, of the elite class and its privileges. But these books – this body of colonial literature – went beyond showing new elites how to assert and defend their traditions against threats from outside, especially threats to the freedom of the port from taxation. These books also showed new elites how they should behave towards their fellow elites of different races, by providing examples of interracial elite interaction in the past, involving prestigious and locally-famous personages – most notably Raffles himself. These books asserted, through examples, a long tradition of European elites welcoming Asian businessmen to Singapore, doing business with them, respecting their legal rights and cultural traditions, and including them in governing bodies and other prestigious institutions, as well as welcoming them into prominent roles as participants in public rituals and events at the centre of the colonial society. In addition, these books chronicled the long history of Asian elites honouring European officials, royalty, and the Empire, with public expressions of loyalty, and also inviting Europeans to sumptuous feasts and receptions at their mansions.

These books presented a heritage of elite-level interracial social integration and inclusion since the time of Raffles. In this way, these books performed a didactic function,<sup>137</sup> showing new elites how to be members of this class, and providing succeeding generations of elites with a recipe of success in the future through following

---

<sup>136</sup> See: John Carroll, *Edge of Empires*, pp. 80-83 and 176-180.

<sup>137</sup> See: Anthony Milner, *Kerajaan*, pp. 86-93.

the examples of the past. The message was that, if certain patterns of elite interaction had worked well for elites in the past, then they should continue to work just as well for future generations of elites. Asian and European elites should stick together, building and sustaining social capital and partaking together in the enjoyment of symbolic capital. All of this information, this body of elite knowledge about their social structure, was presented as having been richly clothed in the prestige of time-honoured tradition and heritage,<sup>138</sup> sanctified by its connection with the image of Raffles, even as it simultaneously reinforced that sanctity through a reciprocal operation of mutual legitimation and conferral of symbolic capital.

The books which described Raffles built up and enshrined the prestigious image and authority of his name, while invoking his name to lend authority and prestige to the institutions of the elite class. Every time elites and their publications invoked the name of Raffles, they further enhanced his image and sustained its prestige, while they used his name to enhance their own prestige. The name and image of Raffles, together with the rituals of the civil religion associated with his memory, constituted important elements of the system of status symbols in which Asian and European elites participated together, and this participation effected the social and symbolic integration of these elites into a multiracial community of prestige.

### **Celebrating Raffles as the Champion of Local Education**

Sir Stamford's admirers did not only celebrate him as the founding father of the Settlement, its free port policy, and its governmental and judicial philosophies which facilitated the success of Asian businessmen as well as their European colleagues. The

---

<sup>138</sup> Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, p. 29; Edward Shils, "Tradition," in: *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*, pp. 182-218.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

cult of Raffles also portrayed its hero as the founder and champion of educational developments in Singapore, and, by extension, throughout Malaya. More specifically, the component of the cult of Raffles that was related to the educational heritage celebrated Raffles for promoting education for Asians, and most especially for Asian elites. The *Raffles* label in education became an important component in the system of status symbols in which Asian elites participated throughout the colonial era.

Asian elites were closely involved in the educational dimension of the Raffles tradition in colonial Singapore, as benefactors, as students and alumni, and as parents of students. Asian elites linked themselves to the prestigious image of Raffles by means of their involvement in educational institutions that were associated with Raffles, and by doing so, they took part in the Raffles heritage and participated in the cult of this founding father. This participation involved a self-reinforcing and self-reproducing dynamic: once Asian elites were connected with the prestige of the Raffles label in education, they thereby *bought into* the educational component of the cult, and became stakeholders in its system of status symbols; thus, they had every reason to want to sustain the prestige of the name of Raffles, and pass it on to their children. The prestigious *Raffles* label in education has survived in Singapore, generation after generation, throughout the colonial era, and even on into the twenty-first century. This is yet another example of evidence for the successful involvement of Asian and European elites in the cult of Raffles.

### **The Singapore Institution: The First Educational Monument to Raffles**

Sir Stamford Raffles formally established an educational institution, called the Singapore Institution, during his final visit to the Settlement. He supervised the



beginning of construction of its campus and presided over its founding ceremony in April 1823, just two months before he left Singapore for the last time.<sup>139</sup> His detailed plans for this Institution were extremely ambitious, considering that Singapore was then probably little more than a frontier trading-post, a cluster of thatched huts surrounded by mangrove swamps, dense jungles, and pirate-infested seas. What he envisioned was nothing less than a regional centre of learning and scholarship, with a multiracial faculty and student body.

Raffles expected his Institution to employ both Asian and European teachers, and to offer instruction in a wide variety of subjects (such as the Arabic, Bugis, Chinese, English, Javanese, Malay, and Siamese languages, as well as anatomy, astronomy, botany, chemistry, ethics, history, logic, medicine, mineralogy, theology, and zoology), to a student body that would include the sons of Asian elites, as well as European students. Raffles decreed that the Institution would have three objectives: the education of the sons of elite Asians, the teaching of Asian languages to the (presumably European) employees of the East India Company, and the gathering of knowledge of the literature, traditions, laws, and customs of Malaya for publication. Indeed, among the first decisions made by Raffles and the Trustees of the Institution were to purchase a printing press, and to authorise the printing of five hundred copies of a dictionary of the Hokkien Chinese dialect, apparently to help Europeans to communicate with Hokkien speakers in the archipelago. The Institution would thus be devoted to publication and research, as well as teaching. Moreover, Raffles specified that the Institution would be open to Muslim, Christian, and *pagan* students alike, and that Asian students and teachers would

---

<sup>139</sup> See the first-hand account of the founding of the Singapore Institution by Raffles in 1823, in: Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, *The Hikayat Abdullah: The Autobiography of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir (1797-1854)*, translated by A.H. Hill, pp. 180-182.

not be required to attend Christian religious rituals. Among the staff listed in the plans for the Institution which Raffles submitted to a meeting of the leading Asian and European inhabitants of Singapore in 1823 were the names of the following Masters: Hassin, Le Sëen Säng, Nunsid, and Shaik Alla Adin.<sup>140</sup>

Yet, despite all of Sir Stamford's careful planning, and his success in raising funds from Sultan Hussein, Temenggong Abdul Rahman, and the leading Europeans,<sup>141</sup> the Institution's future looked bleak in the early years following its formal establishment in 1823. In fact, the Institution was apparently abandoned by 1825, and was soon allowed to decay into a conspicuous ruin, which mouldered in the heart of the growing Settlement.<sup>142</sup> In the early 1830s, it was reported that the ruins of the Singapore Institution, standing on a prominent site near the shore and the Padang, had become an eyesore, attracting the attention of visitors to Singapore when they first arrived in the harbour, and even sheltering thieves.<sup>143</sup> Sir Stamford's beloved Institution had degenerated into an unsightly, crumbling den of criminality; instead of becoming the regional centre of learning and enlightenment which he had imagined, it had been appropriated by the criminal element.

---

<sup>140</sup> Sir Stamford Raffles, "Singapore Institution," in: Lady Raffles, *Memoir*, Appendix pp. 74-84. See also the first-hand account of the founding of the Singapore Institution by Raffles in 1823, in: Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, *The Hikayat Abdullah: The Autobiography of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir (1797-1854)*, translated by A.H. Hill, pp. 180-182.

<sup>141</sup> Regarding the donations to the Singapore Institution in 1823, see: Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, *The Hikayat Abdullah: The Autobiography of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir (1797-1854)*, translated by A.H. Hill, p. 181, and the list of subscriptions in: Lady Raffles, *Memoir* (1830), Appendix pp. 85-86.

<sup>142</sup> The Singapore Institution was already a ruin as early as April 1825, when a young American named William C. Hunter visited Singapore. See: William C. Hunter, *Bits of Old China* (1855; republished 1966), pp. 232-233. I am grateful to Senior Librarian Tim Yap Fuan of the NUS Central Library for kindly bringing this book to my attention.

<sup>143</sup> See: George Windsor Earl, *The Eastern Seas, or Voyages and Adventures in the Indian Archipelago, in 1832-33-34* (1837), p. 350; and: C.B. Buckley, *An Anecdotal History*, p. 127, quoting the *Singapore Free Press*.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

Happily for the future of the cult of Raffles and the remembrance of his name, Sir Stamford's admirers finally rescued the Singapore Institution from oblivion, allowing it to emerge at last from the shadowy limbo where it had languished for more than a decade. The Singapore Institution was revived in January 1836, when a public meeting of the subscribers to the fund for the monument to Raffles resolved to donate the funds which they had raised to the completion of the Singapore Institution.<sup>144</sup> Sir Stamford's admirers began donating funds for this monument when the news of their hero's death finally reached Singapore in early 1827,<sup>145</sup> but nine years later there was still no monument. The contributors towards this fund evidently felt that the support of an educational institution that Raffles personally established was an excellent way to commemorate his memory.<sup>146</sup> If any of these contributors had read Sir Stamford's papers collected in the *Memoir* of Lady Raffles, which was published in 1830, they would have known that the Singapore Institution was very dear to his heart. It is quite reasonable to suspect that some of the supporters of the Raffles monument fund may have indeed read the *Memoir*, and that its publication may have thus played a significant role in the resurrection of the moribund Singapore Institution.

The Singapore Institution was finally completed over a decade after the death of Raffles, and began to function as an important educational institution, due at least in some measure to the donation from the Raffles monument fund. Thus, the revival of the Singapore Institution may be regarded as a multiracial effort, since the monument fund

---

<sup>144</sup> C.B. Buckley, *An Anecdotal History*, p. 129.

<sup>145</sup> *Singapore Chronicle*, 1 February 1827, p. 1, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0009222.

<sup>146</sup> This was the opinion of George Windsor Earl, who lived in Singapore from June 1833 to March 1834. See: George Windsor Earl, *The Eastern Seas*, p. 351, and C.M. Turnbull's Introduction to the 1971 Oxford University Press edition of Earl's book.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

included contributions from Syed Omar Joneid,<sup>147</sup> Syed Mohamed Habshy, and Bawa Sah,<sup>148</sup> together with a number of Europeans. This Institution began a tradition of prestigious multiracial education, and eventually educated many of the leading people of Singapore. Classes finally started in the building in December 1837, with 102 Chinese boys, as well as 46 Indians and 51 Malays.<sup>149</sup> The Institution was thus a multiracial school right from the outset. The preponderance of Asian students in this elite school reflected the preponderance of well-to-do Asians in the upper stratum of society in colonial Singapore.

This educational institution was associated with the memory of Raffles right from the start, and this naturally contributed to the development his cult. Lady Raffles sent a bust of her late husband to the Singapore Institution in the 1830s.<sup>150</sup> The relationship between the memory of Raffles and the Singapore Institution survived in the public consciousness thanks in part to occasional reminders. In 1837, Sir William Norris quoted to the Grand Jury a speech given by Raffles when he founded the Singapore Institution, which indicates that the connection between Raffles and education was very much alive in the minds of at least some people at that time.<sup>151</sup> The continuing association of the Singapore Institution with the public memory of Raffles finally culminated in the changing of the Institution's name.

---

<sup>147</sup> *Singapore Chronicle*, 15 February 1827, p. 1, microfilm reel R0009222. Syed Omar Joneid may have been Syed Omar bin Ali Al-Junied, a wealthy Arab businessman.

<sup>148</sup> *Singapore Chronicle*, 1 March 1827, p. 2, microfilm reel R0009222.

<sup>149</sup> Buckley, p. 131.

<sup>150</sup> John Bastin, "Raffles in Marble & Bronze," *The Straits Times Annual for 1972*, p. 58. The donation of this bust is mentioned in an obituary for Lady Raffles, in: *Singapore Free Press* (overland), 6 April 1859, p. 1, R0006023. A bust of Raffles was mentioned in a report on a meeting of the Trustees of the Raffles Institution in 1869; this report indicates that the Municipal Commissioners were planning to remove the bust from the Institution. A letter from the Honourable Secretary and Vice President of the Raffles Institution, quoted in the minutes of a meeting of the Municipal Commissioners on 8 December 1869 and published ten days later in the *Straits Times*, indicated that the Trustees of the Institution had agreed to loan the bust to the Municipal Commissioners. See: *Straits Times*, 18 December 1869, pp. 1-2, R0016422.

<sup>151</sup> Buckley, p. 16.

## **Raffles Institution**

The Singapore Institution became known as Raffles Institution in 1868,<sup>152</sup> thus further enhancing the prestige associated with the name of Raffles by associating his name with what was perhaps the most prestigious educational institution in Singapore at that time. Raffles was thereby enshrined and institutionalised as the hero of education in Singapore, as well as the founder of the Settlement itself. In the course of a discussion of Raffles Institution in the Legislative Council in 1869, the Honourable Legislative Councillor W.H. Read referred to the need to carry out the original intentions of Sir Stamford Raffles.<sup>153</sup> The listings for Raffles Institution in the annual local directories asserted the school's connection with Raffles, by proudly claiming that it was founded by Raffles in 1823.<sup>154</sup> In 1874, Governor Sir Andrew Clarke invoked the memory of Raffles when he announced his plan to use Raffles Institution to teach the sons of Malay rulers.<sup>155</sup>

Asian elites were closely involved with Raffles Institution. This was only natural, since this school educated many of their children. Raffles Institution became very important to generations of local Asian elites, apparently serving as a highly-valued status symbol and a prestigious mark of distinction, as well as promoting Western-style education among Asians.<sup>156</sup> Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa was a trustee of Raffles Institution

---

<sup>152</sup> Buckley, p. 139.

<sup>153</sup> See p. 83 of the minutes of a meeting of the Legislative Council in Singapore on 2 November 1869, on p. 40 of Colonial Office file CO 275 / 10, on NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0002002.

<sup>154</sup> For example: *The Straits Calendar and Directory*, 1870 edition, p. 17; 1871, p. 18; 1873, p. 18.

<sup>155</sup> Colonel R.H. Vetch, editor, *Life of Lieut.-General the Hon. Sir Andrew Clarke* (1905), p. 132.

<sup>156</sup> See the mentions of prominent Chinese men who were educated at Raffles Institution, in: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 44, 99, 159, 240, 242, 274, 278, 308, 309, 314, 322, 350, 352, 354, 368, 377, 427, 433, and 519.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

in 1869,<sup>157</sup> the same year that Queen Victoria honoured him with his appointment as the first Chinese Member of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements.<sup>158</sup> Many well-to-do Asians sent their sons to Raffles Institution over the years. By the 1840s, most of the students at the Singapore Institution were boys from prosperous Chinese families.<sup>159</sup> Yet, non-Chinese students were also represented in the classrooms. In 1885, the *Straits Times* published a multiracial list of prize-winning students at Raffles Institution, which included a variety of Asian and Western names – among them were Chinese, Indian, European (or Eurasian), Parsi, and Muslim names.<sup>160</sup> The sons of prosperous families of various races could meet and become acquainted in the classrooms of their prestigious school.

Raffles Institution retained its prestige as a leading educational institution throughout the colonial era, and beyond. Raffles Institution became regarded (at least by some!) as the leading English-medium school on the island.<sup>161</sup> Among the boys who studied at Raffles Institution in the colonial era were several future leaders of Singapore, including a future Chief Minister (David Marshall), the second Yang di-Pertuan Negara and first President of Singapore (Yusof bin Ishak), a future Foreign Minister (S. Rajaratnam), and the first two Prime Ministers (Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Chok Tong).<sup>162</sup>

For Lee Kuan Yew, there was an element of family tradition involved, since his

---

<sup>157</sup> *Straits Times*, 25 September 1869, un-numbered Supplement page; 20 November 1869, p. 1; and 18 December 1869, p. 1; R0016422.

<sup>158</sup> *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, No. 52, 24 December 1869, p. 774, Government Notification No. 249.

<sup>159</sup> C.M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements*, p. 226.

<sup>160</sup> *Straits Times*, 13 February 1885, p. 3, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016433.

<sup>161</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* (1998), p. 36; Edwin Lee and Tan Tai Yong, *Beyond Degrees*, p. 61.

<sup>162</sup> Low Yit Leng, “Uniform Success: Singapore’s Top Schools,” in: *Singapore Chronicles: A Special Commemorative History of Singapore Published by Singapore Tatler on the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Republic* (1995), p. 198.

grandfather, Lee Hoon Leong, a prominent businessman in Singapore in the early decades of the twentieth century, had also attended Raffles Institution.<sup>163</sup>

### **Raffles Girls' School**

The daughters of Asian elites were not to be left out of the celebration of Raffles as the father of education in Singapore: the Singapore Institution established a girls' department in 1844, and in 1871 the girls' school was established in a building in Bras Basah Road, later moving to another building in Beach Road. Finally, construction began on a new Raffles Girls' School building in 1881, which opened in 1883.<sup>164</sup> Raffles Girls' School developed a reputation for excellence; Aisha Akbar recalls that her father regarded it as the best school for his daughter to attend, in order to acquire an English-language education.<sup>165</sup>

Like Raffles Institution, Raffles Girls' School acquired the prestigious reputation of being one of the leading schools in Singapore.<sup>166</sup> The former students of Raffles Institution and Raffles Girls' School established their own clubs by 1893.<sup>167</sup> The Raffles name as a label of a prestigious Western-style educational institution for both boys and girls may thus have been established among the Asian population of Singapore by the late nineteenth century. It may be remembered that Raffles wanted to establish an

---

<sup>163</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>164</sup> C. Bazell, "Education in Singapore," in: Makepeace *et al.*, eds., *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume One, pp. 432 and 443-445.

<sup>165</sup> Aisha Akbar, *Aishabee at War: A Very Frank Memoir*, p. 51.

<sup>166</sup> George L. Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, p. 127; Low Yit Leng, "Uniform Success: Singapore's Top Schools," in: *Singapore Chronicles: A Special Commemorative History of Singapore Published by Singapore Tatler on the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Republic* (1995), p. 195.

<sup>167</sup> *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser Weekly Mail Edition*, 2 January 1894, p. 435, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0006042.

educational system to serve especially the higher classes of Asians<sup>168</sup> – in other words, an Asian elite.

### **Raffles Library and Museum**

The famous Raffles Library and Museum was one of the most prominent institutions to carry Sir Stamford's name in colonial Singapore, and it may be considered together with the educational institutions that were connected with his memory. Although it might be argued that libraries and museums are not educational institutions in the strict sense of the term, in the sense of enrolling students and providing them with formal courses of instruction, it is clear that libraries and museums are educational institutions in their own way, and this was certainly true with regard to the Raffles Library and Museum. The Raffles Library made books available to generations of local readers, while the Raffles Museum displayed a wide variety of exhibits related to the surrounding region.

This institution may be regarded as yet another legacy of the founder, or at least, of the realisation of one of his dreams for Singapore. There is evidence that, when Raffles founded the Singapore Institution in 1823, he also established a museum and library within this Institution, since there was a reference to the Institution's library and museum in the minutes of a meeting of the Trustees of the Singapore Institution, which was attended by Raffles in April 1823.<sup>169</sup> Although the Singapore Institution was dormant from the mid-1820s to the mid-1830s, there seems to have still been some

---

<sup>168</sup> Sir Stamford Raffles, quoted in: Lady Raffles, *Memoir*, Appendix pp. 32, 33, 35, 36, and 79; G.G. Hough, "Notes on the Educational Policy of Sir Stamford Raffles," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume XI, Part II (December 1933), p. 168; C. Bazell, "Education in Singapore," in: Makepeace *et al.*, eds., *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume One, pp. 427-428.

<sup>169</sup> Minutes of a meeting of the Trustees of the Singapore Institution, on 15 April 1823, in: Lady Raffles, *Memoir* (1830), Appendix p. 84.



## *The Cult of Raffles*

interest in a library in Singapore, as suggested by a letter which was published in the *Singapore Chronicle* in 1829, which suggested that the funds which had been contributed for a monument to commemorate Raffles should be used to build a library on the Plain, to be called the Raffles Library.<sup>170</sup> Although this proposal did not materialise, the notion of associating a local library with the memory of Raffles was to reappear triumphantly later in the nineteenth century, with the establishment of the Raffles Library and Museum in a grand domed neoclassical building, appropriately facing *Stamford Road*, in 1887.<sup>171</sup>

The combination of the Library and the Museum in the same complex followed the time-honoured traditions of the ancient library and museum at Alexandria in Egypt, and the British Library in London, with its famous library housed in a magnificent domed Reading Room. The grand dome of the Raffles Library and Museum building, though constructed on a much smaller scale than the dome of the Reading Room in London, may nevertheless have evoked memories of the larger dome in the minds of those who had visited the British Museum. Aside from the domes, the British Museum and the Raffles Library and Museum also shared architectural references to the dignified classical tradition.

Even the Japanese invaders made a point of taking good care of the Raffles Library and Museum during their occupation of Singapore from 1942 to 1945 (although they changed its name), which suggests some sense of just how famous and respectable this institution had become internationally – and, thus, how successful this institution had been in helping to further enhance the prestige of the *Raffles* name.

---

<sup>170</sup> *Singapore Chronicle*, 12 March 1829, pp. 2-3, R0009222.

<sup>171</sup> “Address of His Excellency Governor Sir Frederick Aloysius Weld, G.C.M.G., at a Meeting of the Legislative Council, held on Thursday, the 13<sup>th</sup> October, 1887.” Published as “Government Notification No. 503” in: *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, Volume XXI, No. 47, 14 October 1887; paragraph 25 on p. 1932.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

The grand new Singapore National Library, opened in 2005, carries on the Raffles Library tradition in a modern setting, in a futuristic high-rise building, built on a site which includes property that once belonged to Andrew Farquhar, the Eurasian son of William Farquhar, the first Resident of Singapore.<sup>172</sup> The connection between the National Library and the Raffles tradition has continued into the twenty-first century, as indicated by the plans for the visit of Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko to Singapore in June 2006. Their visit included a stop at the National Library, where the Japanese royal visitors would be shown one of Sir Stamford's letters.<sup>173</sup>

### **Raffles College**

The development of the name of Raffles as an educational label and status symbol in colonial Singapore was completed with the establishment of Raffles College, which accepted its first cohort of students in 1928.<sup>174</sup> Much as Asian and European elites had contributed together to the establishment of Raffles Institution in the nineteenth century, so too did Asian elites join their European fellow elites in the generous donation of funds towards the establishment of Raffles College, which was located on a suburban campus in a fashionable neighbourhood, on a hill next to the Botanic Gardens along Bukit Timah Road.<sup>175</sup> The generosity of the Asian and European benefactors of Raffles College was commemorated in public speeches, articles in the press, the inscription of their names on

---

<sup>172</sup> Leong Foke Meng, "Early Land Transactions in Singapore: The Real Estates of William Farquhar (1774-1839), John Crawfurd (1783-1868), and Their Families," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume LXXVII, Part 1 (June 2004), p. 30, footnote 43.

<sup>173</sup> <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/print/212622/1/.html>

<sup>174</sup> Edwin Lee and Tan Tai Yong, *Beyond Degrees: The Making of the National University of Singapore*, pp. 45-51.

<sup>175</sup> *Malaya Tribune*, April 22, 1929, p. 3, R0005872.

a marble tablet, and the naming of buildings on the college campus after two of the most generous Asian benefactors, Oei Tiong Ham and Sir Manasseh Meyer.<sup>176</sup>

Although classes started at Raffles College in 1928, the grand opening ceremony was not held until 1929. This grand event was the occasion of further public celebration of Raffles and the enhancement of his public image. During his speech at this ceremony, Governor Sir Hugh Clifford discussed Sir Stamford's reputation, noting that it had actually become much greater over the years after his death. Governor Clifford attributed to Raffles the credit for the establishment of a tradition of successful cooperation among people of different races, and the Governor described his opening of Raffles College as, figuratively speaking, yet another stone contributed to a monument to Raffles, a monument to which he believed that many earlier governors had also helped to build up over the years.<sup>177</sup> Sir Manasseh Meyer, the wealthy leader of the Jewish community in Singapore who was born in Baghdad, enjoyed the distinction of being seated in the front row during this opening ceremony.<sup>178</sup> Unfortunately, Oei Tiong Ham was unable to attend the ceremony, since he died in 1924 at his home in Dalvey Road, in the fashionable suburbs near the Raffles College campus.<sup>179</sup> Still, he was present at least in name, since the grand opening ceremony was held in the building that was named in his honour: Oei Tiong Ham Hall.

Of course, schools and colleges are not merely places of education – they are also important social venues, which foster the development of social connections and

---

<sup>176</sup> See the speech by the Hon. Dr. R.O. Winstedt, at the opening ceremony of Raffles College, published in the *Straits Times*, 23 July 1929, a clipping of which is in the Raffles Scrapbook, NUS Central Library Rare Books Collection Stack #R4091.

<sup>177</sup> Speech given by Governor Sir Hugh Clifford at the opening of Raffles College, published in the *Straits Times*, 23 July 1929, a clipping of which is in the Raffles Scrapbook, NUS Central Library Rare Books Collection Stack #R4091.

<sup>178</sup> Edwin Lee and Tan Tai Yong, *Beyond Degrees*, p. 51.

<sup>179</sup> *Malaya Tribune*, 4 June 1924, p. 7.

### *The Cult of Raffles*

networking among their students. As such, they can be especially important in the promotion of the social integration and identity-formation of the elite class. Since Raffles College was a coeducational college, student life at Raffles College provided opportunities for eligible young local ladies and gentlemen to form acquaintanceships which could lead to marriage. The location of Raffles College adjacent to the Botanic Gardens provided young couples with convenient access to paths suitable for romantic strolls.<sup>180</sup> Marriage ties among the offspring of the elites would, of course, further contribute to the social integration and solidarity of the elite class. Among the young ladies at Raffles College just before the Japanese invasion was Miss Kwa Geok Choo, whose father, Kwa Siew Tee, was a prominent local banker. When Miss Kwa married her former fellow student at Raffles College, Lee Kuan Yew, after the war, their marriage was not only a union between two highly intelligent individuals, but was also a connection between two elite local families.

The renowned American sociologist E. Digby Baltzell pointed out that social connections and class considerations may be especially important to elites, and that prestigious schools are among the important upper-class institutions with which individuals can affiliate themselves, thus asserting their identity as fellow members of this class. In modern societies, social connections, affiliation with prestigious institutions, and associational networks can define the upper class as a group, taking the place of membership in families and lineages in traditional societies. For the members of an upper class in a modern society, their shared experience of elite schooling, and their shared association with prestigious educational institutions, can be among the distinctive symbols, institutions, traditions, lifestyles, social heritage or artefacts, which distinguish

---

<sup>180</sup> Edwin Lee and Tan Tai Yong, *Beyond Degrees*, p. 55.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

these members of the upper class from the rest of the population, and set them apart as a distinctive group.<sup>181</sup> One particularly prominent former student of Raffles College, Lee Kuan Yew, has recalled that the shared background and experiences of education at this elite college, and the social connections formed there before the war, promoted networking among the multiracial English-educated elite group, of which he was a member.<sup>182</sup>

The elite status of Raffles College is suggested by the distinctions which some of its former students later achieved. Among the students of Raffles College were a future Prime Minister (Lee Kuan Yew), Deputy Prime Minister (Toh Chin Chye), Ministers of Finance (Goh Keng Swee and Hon Sui Sen), and Ministers of Law (K.M. Byrne and E.W. Barker). One manifestation of the social element within elite schools anywhere is the evolution of prestigious clubs within the student bodies, and the ranks of the alumni; in this regard, Raffles College was no exception. The students of Raffles College formed their own club, called the Raffles College Union, which organised splendid banquets for its members. When the first cohort of Raffles College students graduated in 1931, they established an alumni club, called the Stamford Club, which eventually opened branches in several places in Malaya, as well as in Singapore.<sup>183</sup>

The Raffles College Union and the Stamford Club each derived prestige from their association with the memory of Sir Stamford Raffles, and at the same time, they each contributed additional prestige and symbolic capital to the *Raffles* brand name. Thus, the creation of the Raffles College Union and the Stamford Club by those educated

---

<sup>181</sup> E. Digby Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class*, pp. 5, 7, 9, 10, 13, 16, 18, 21, 24, 32, 49. See also: E. Digby Baltzell, *The Protestant Establishment: Aristocracy & Caste in America*, pp. 335-358.

<sup>182</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* (1998), p. 43.

<sup>183</sup> Edwin Lee and Tan Tai Yong, *Beyond Degrees*, pp. 63 and 65.

at Raffles College, and their participation together in these institutions, represented the pooling, distribution, and communion of symbolic capital by elites of different races and cultural identities. These social organisations provided young elites of various races with yet more opportunities to develop interracial social connections within their class, and offering them additional shared backgrounds and mutual association with shared institutional symbols of their elite status.

### **Giving Raffles Too Much Credit as the Local Hero of Education**

Sir Stamford's admirers accorded great honour to him for his achievements as the founder and patron of education in Singapore. Indeed, at least two of his admirers went so far as to give Raffles even more credit than he was due with regard to the history of education in Malaya. In 1926, Captain R.L. German of the Malayan Civil Service claimed in his *Handbook to British Malaya* that Sir Stamford's establishment of the Singapore Institution in 1823 marked the beginning of educational history not just of Singapore, but of all of British Malaya as well!<sup>184</sup>

To his credit, the over-enthusiastic Captain German corrected this error in the 1930 edition of his *Handbook*,<sup>185</sup> in which he mentioned the Penang Free School, which was opened in 1816. However, it seems that the myth that attributed to Raffles the credit for starting English-language education in Malaya lived on, as indicated by a claim to this effect in an article published in the prestigious *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* in 1933.<sup>186</sup> Of course, it would be expected that such a respectable journal would only accept articles written by authors with reputable qualifications.

---

<sup>184</sup> Captain R.L. German, *Handbook to British Malaya* (1926), p. 130.

<sup>185</sup> Captain R.L. German, *Handbook to British Malaya* (1930), p. 148.

<sup>186</sup> G.G. Hough, "Notes on the Educational Policy of Sir Stamford Raffles," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume XI, Part II (December 1933), p. 166.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

Indeed, this article was written by a lecturer in the Department of English Language and Literature at Raffles College, who was eventually promoted to the rank of Professor there, before relocating to England, where he became a Cambridge don.<sup>187</sup>

These examples of excessive praise for Sir Stamford's achievements in the realm of education should be regarded not merely as examples of errors of fact, but also as valuable insights into the successful development of the cult of Raffles, which had built up the legendary image of Raffles to such an extent that well-informed people could readily believe that he was even more important than he actually was. The claims that Raffles was the founder of English-language education (if not *all* education!) for all of Malaya indicate the enthusiasm of his admirers, and the fact that the cult of Raffles had succeeded in establishing his credentials as the founding father of education in Singapore to such an extent that he was even mistakenly acclaimed as the first architect of education in Malaya.

Such beliefs and examples of over-enthusiasm were the natural outcomes of the celebration of the memory of Raffles and the cultivation of his image throughout the colonial era. They were the natural consequences of the success of the cult of Raffles in elevating the image of this man into a legendary, larger-than-life figure. It is only to be expected that a thriving cult of Raffles would lead to the exaggeration of his glory, and the fact that intelligent . The efforts of Sir Stamford's Asian and European admirers to cultivate his legendary image and promote his cult had not been in vain.

---

<sup>187</sup> Edwin Lee and Tan Tai Yong, *Beyond Degrees: The Making of the National University of Singapore*, p. 76.

### **The Raffles Professors of History and Zoology**

The establishment of the Raffles Chairs of History and Zoology at the University of Malaya in Singapore provided a fitting *coda* to the history of educational monuments to the memory of Raffles. The choice of these departments to have chairs named in Sir Stamford's honour was certainly appropriate, given his interest in Malayan history and in wildlife.<sup>188</sup> The naming of these chairs after Raffles associated the University of Malaya with an historical figure, serving to commemorate Sir Stamford's connection with Singapore and its educational system, as well as helping to sustain the fame and prestige of his name.

In 1949, Raffles College merged with the King Edward VII College of Medicine to form the University of Malaya. After the Chairs of the History and Zoology Departments of the new university were designated Raffles Chairs, Dr. R.D. Purchon, a specialist in marine life, chaired the Zoology Department as Raffles Professor of Zoology.<sup>189</sup> Meanwhile, C. Northcote Parkinson became the first Raffles Professor of History in April 1950.<sup>190</sup> In his inaugural lecture delivered in the Oei Tiong Ham Hall in May 1950, Parkinson reflected on the creation of the Raffles Chair, and his appointment as its first occupant.<sup>191</sup> His lecture included two lengthy quotations from a paper which Raffles wrote in 1819, regarding his plans for a Malay College in Singapore. Parkinson invoked Sir Stamford's words to argue that the location of the University of Malaya in Singapore suited it well to function as a centre for historical research, as well as for the

---

<sup>188</sup> See: John Bastin, "Raffles the Naturalist," *The Straits Times Annual for 1971*, pp. 58-63.

<sup>189</sup> Edwin Lee and Tan Tai Yong, *Beyond Degrees: The Making of the National University of Singapore*, p. 94.

<sup>190</sup> *Annual Report of the University of Malaya 1949-50*, p. 42.

<sup>191</sup> C. Northcote Parkinson, *Inaugural Public Lecture Delivered by Dr. C. Northcote Parkinson, M.A., Ph.D., Raffles Professor of History in the University on 19th May, 1950 in the Oei Tiong Ham Hall, University of Malaya*.



## *The Cult of Raffles*

study of the customs, languages, laws, literature, and traditions of the peoples of this region. As Raffles Professor of History, C. Northcote Parkinson wrote an article about Charles Wurtzburg's biography of Raffles, which also discussed a number of other biographies of Raffles.

Around the time that Parkinson left the University of Malaya in Singapore, his famous book *Parkinson's Law* was published, and his name became part of the English language. Parkinson was succeeded by an Australian historian, K.G. Tregonning, who was in turn succeeded by a Singaporean historian, Wong Lin Ken, who held this title until his death in 1983; meanwhile, the University of Malaya became the University of Singapore, and it later merged with Nantah to become the National University of Singapore in 1980. Parkinson, Tregonning, and Wong were especially appropriate to occupy the Raffles Chair, since each explored the history of the peoples of the archipelago, a topic in which Raffles was closely interested. While holding the post of Raffles Professor, each of these three historians accomplished the type of work which would have interested Raffles. They carried on his tradition. Moreover, by accepting the Raffles Chair, these three historians lent their academic prestige as eminent historians to the Raffles name, and helped to keep this name alive in the academic context.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The cult of Raffles cast Raffles in the role of not merely the founder of the Settlement, but also as the very personification of the ideologies that were held dear by Asian and European elites in colonial Singapore, namely, the free trade policy, English education for Asian elites, equality before the law, respect for Asian customs and protection of the rights of property owners. In general, the Raffles tradition represented a

### *The Cult of Raffles*

colonial society in which people of different races could be secure in their customs, social status, and property rights, and enjoy opportunities for economic advancement and social mobility regardless of race or religion. Naturally, these concepts were especially appealing to the property-owning stratum of the Asian and European inhabitants of colonial Singapore, and it was from this class that the participants in the cult of Raffles were drawn.

The scriptures and rituals of the celebration of Raffles expressed the social and symbolic solidarity of the Asian and European elites, who imagined and represented an image of the colonial society as a community with its own local traditions and heritage tracing back to Raffles and linking him to the pro-business ideology of the freedom of the port, an ideology which appealed to and benefited Asian business elites at least as much as their Western fellow elites. These rituals and scriptures expressed and affirmed a vision of a multiracial colonial society characterised by close and mutually-beneficial cooperation among the different sections of the population, and especially among the Asian and European elites. Indeed, the image of Raffles was the personal embodiment of this multiracial colonial system, of a benevolent colonial ruler who promoted a harmonious vision of society which was, of course, very beneficial to the interests of these elites, who needed a generally stable colonial society within which to achieve their economic, political, and symbolic goals.

While the Raffles legend may have helped to secure economic rewards to local elites by sanctifying the free port ideology, the civil religion of Raffles also conferred non-material social rewards of status and prestige. The celebration of the memory of Raffles made his name into a label of prestige and status, with which Asian and European

## *The Cult of Raffles*

elites could associate, both on an individual level and on a group level; for example, a prosperous businessman could have an office in Raffles Place, send his sons to Raffles Institution and his daughters to Raffles Girls' School, and later send them all to Raffles College. The Raffles name seems to have become an especially prestigious label with regard to education; biographical sketches of Chinese elites often mention if they were educated at Raffles Institution.<sup>192</sup> Lee Kip Lee recalled how his father kept a Raffles Institution blazer in his wardrobe, together with its necktie.<sup>193</sup>

The civil religion of Raffles sanctified the elite-led social structure, and conferred prestige benefits upon the Asian and European elites who participated in its rituals, as well as their organisations, which contributed to the veneration and enshrinement of Raffles, and thus associated themselves with his iconic image. Elites and elite-led organisations *pooled* their social resources by investing the Raffles image with prestige, and, in turn, these elites and their organisations received prestige rewards from the civil religion of Raffles. The image and name of Raffles became an important component of the system of status symbols in colonial Singapore; by enshrining the memory of Raffles as a central prestigious icon of the social structure and its system of status symbols, and a symbol which was shared and appreciated by Asian and European elites alike, the cult of Raffles fostered the sense of *centricity* of the multiracial elite class.<sup>194</sup>

Over time, the cult of Raffles took on a life of its own, attracting greater and greater social honour and prestige through a variation of the Matthew Effect,<sup>195</sup> giving

---

<sup>192</sup> See the mentions of prominent Chinese men who were educated at Raffles Institution, in: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 44, 99, 159, 240, 242, 274, 278, 308, 309, 314, 322, 350, 352, 354, 368, 377, 427, 433, and 519.

<sup>193</sup> Lee Kip Lee, *Amber Sands: A Boyhood Memoir*, p. 2.

<sup>194</sup> On the concepts of *centricity* and *pooling*, see: Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, pp. 188-190.

<sup>195</sup> See: Robert K. Merton, "The Matthew Effect in Science," in: Robert K. Merton, *The Sociology of Science: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations*, pp. 439-459.

### *The Cult of Raffles*

those elites who had already associated themselves with this symbolism and bought into the cult a reason to want to contribute to it, and increasing the magnetic effect of the Raffles label on new and aspiring elites who would wish to take part to enhance their own prestige. The more prestige attached to the image and name of Raffles, the more that Asian and European elites naturally desired to associate themselves with Raffles, by praising him and by becoming the high priests, or at least the leading devotees, of the cult of Raffles. Participation in this civil religion became an avenue whereby elites could realise their individual symbolic aspirations to affirm their own elite status, while also asserting their fellow membership in the elite class. This was a self-reinforcing process, since the more eagerly and fervently the elites took part in the celebration of Raffles, the more prestige was attached to the image of Raffles, and hence the more attractive the Raffles name became to elites, generation after generation. The cult of Raffles had become a social and symbolic mechanism for the integration of the multiracial elite class, as it provided motivations and avenues for ritual interactions and the sharing of status symbols among the members of this class.

The civil religion of Raffles provided Asian and European elites with symbolic resources for their mutual consumption in a communion of status, and this communion brought them – and kept them – in close proximity in social space, at the summit of the colonial society and the centre of *their* colonial system. Their close association with the status-conferring rituals, institutions, traditions, and symbols of the colonial system affirmed that this colonial system revolved around them, that they all belonged to one multiracial elite class, and that colonial Singapore belonged jointly to Asian and European elites alike. The cult of Raffles, as a component of the larger system of

### *The Cult of Raffles*

colonial status symbols, provided Asian and Western elites with a rich body of symbols and traditions which they could share as fellow stakeholders in colonialism and imperialism, thus emphasising and affirming their affinities and shared status identities, as fellow members of a socially and symbolically integrated multiracial elite class in a Southeast Asian colonial port city.

The development of the mythic image of Raffles and its associated iconography and rituals of civil religion by Asian and European elites gave these elites something else which they could share, along with their devotion to capitalism, the sanctity of property rights, opportunities for economic success and social ambition, and the imperial monarchy and its system of honours and labels. Indeed, the cult of Raffles and the colonial civil religion focussed on the imperial monarchy paralleled one another in the local multiracial elite social structure; both featured solemn rituals, venerated institutions, time-honoured traditions, and prestigious labels (such as *Royal*, *Victoria*, and, of course, *Raffles*) – all tied to the status and prestige of Asian and European elites as individuals and collectively as members of an elite class. Both the cult of Raffles and the civil religion of monarchy belonged to – and were claimed and built up by – the Asian and European elites alike; and public rituals often associated Raffles and royalty with one another. The members of this elite class were recognised as possessing elite status not only by their reputation of wealth, but also by their association with prestigious status symbols, and their participation together in the colonial system of status symbols.

It is important to understand the nature of the long-running, friendly, and cooperative relationship between Asian elites and their Western fellow elites, since colonialism and imperialism in Singapore and its Malayan hinterland could not have

## *The Cult of Raffles*

happened as they did, without the active cooperation and incorporation of Asian elites. These Asian elites were brought into the colonial and imperial system as stakeholders by more than just economic motives and interactions; they were also incorporated into the colonial and imperial framework through processes of social and symbolic integration, through their active and eager participation in a system of status symbols which transcended differences in racial and cultural identities. This exploration of the symbolic dimension of the cooperative interaction between Asian and European elites helps to explain how and why they cooperated, by exploring the nature and variety of the symbolic rewards which were created and sustained by these elites, and which were made available for these elites to consume together, despite their cultural differences.

When examples of the many components or elements of the cult of Raffles are listed together – as they have been in the preceding pages – they fit together, like the scattered pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, to reveal a picture of the continuous celebration and apotheosis of Raffles since the founding of the Settlement. The more that Raffles was celebrated, the more that his iconic reputation was accepted as taken-for-granted, and, thus, the more likely it became that it would be celebrated further in the future. Thanks to the Matthew Effect,<sup>196</sup> the *Raffles* name has become increasingly rich in symbolic capital over time. Sir Stamford's name lives on as a brand name that is rich in symbolic value, and it shows no sign of dying out. A recent edition of the Singapore telephone directory lists seventy-four businesses and educational institutions which bear the name Raffles, which suggests that this name is still very much a prestigious label and brand name in Singapore in the early twenty-first century.<sup>197</sup>

---

<sup>196</sup> See: Merton, op. cit.

<sup>197</sup> *Singapore Phone Book Business Listings 2005 / 2006*, pp. 654-656.

## *The Cult of Raffles*

The Raffles tradition and legend, involved ideas about free trade, educational opportunities, equal rights before the law for everyone; equal opportunities for economic success and upward social mobility for all races, a society which included and benefited people of different nationalities – this whole package which was associated with the *Raffles* label or brand name, offered elites of all races a vision of *their* colonial society in which they could take a great deal of pride, and in which they could feel a sense of ownership and stakeholdership. Sir Stamford's own life was portrayed as a rags-to-riches story, which could be taken as an example for others to follow, and as an expression of the belief in opportunity and improvement which characterised the Raffles tradition. Yet, the reality of society in colonial Singapore (like many, if not all societies, past and present, colonial and otherwise) was a society characterised by vast inequalities in wealth and status, a social reality in which the vast majority of people were not even close to being elites, and had virtually no chance of ever attaining elite status. This is not to say that no one succeeded in rising from coolie to towkay; but most coolies doubtlessly never rose above the coolie level.

While the colonial system was certainly very good *for elites* regardless of their race, the celebration of a legendary ideal of equal opportunities and the romance of rags-to-riches stories may distract us from the reality that there must have been many more stories of rags-to-rags than rags-to-riches – and the rags-to-rags stories are more rarely told. By portraying the colonial system as one in which equal opportunities allowed everyone the chance to become an elite, regardless of race or background, the cult of Raffles helped to rationalise and legitimate a system in which a small community of elites (comprising mainly Asian elites together with a few European elites) enjoyed enormous

## *The Cult of Raffles*

material wealth and symbolic capital, within a social order which was generally characterised by massive inequality.

Of course, inequality is evidently inherent to the human condition. No major social or political system has managed to eliminate inequality, and history suggests that attempts to bring about a truly egalitarian and equalitarian society may lead to disaster. The French Revolution led to the Reign of Terror, while the Russian Revolution led to the *gulag* and the Chinese Revolution produced the Great Leap Forward, in which millions of Chinese starved to death. It may be that the social inequality of a social system with an elite class functions to make tyranny or dictatorship less likely, since elites may be expected to jealously guard their social system against any threats from a would-be tyrant or demagogue. Elites can provide the necessary leadership and organisation (as well as a vested interest) to prevent the concentration of power in the hands of one tyrant or demagogue.

Still, it would seem that people in modern societies like to believe in a myth of equality. While traditional, agrarian societies tended to believe in divinely-appointed hierarchies of kings, nobles, and peasants, and that all people should be content with the station in life to which they were born, modern societies seem to be characterised by a belief that all people should be dissatisfied with their lot, and constantly strive to increase their material wealth and symbolic capital, and this striving depends on a belief that such efforts can be rewarded. Modern societies may thus be expected to create myths and legends which claim that everyone is really equal, or at least, that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed. Without this myth, popular frustrations might boil over into



### *The Cult of Raffles*

disorder which might not only threaten the privileges of the elite, but might also break down the elite-led social structures which guard against tyranny.

The participation of Asian elites in the cult of Raffles, together with their European fellow elites, shows that the interactions between Asians and Europeans in colonial Singapore were not limited to the economic realm, and, thus, the multiracial society of colonial Singapore not conform to Furnivall's definition of the plural colonial society, since he claimed that such a society was characterised *exclusively* by economic interactions among the different racial or ethnic sections. In colonial Singapore, Asian and European elites interacted not only in the economic realm, but also in the social and symbolic realms as well, by taking part together in a shared system of status symbols, and playing their parts together in the colonial theatre of prestige. Since Furnivall's definition of the plural colonial society clearly did not apply to Singapore, then perhaps Furnivall was wrong about other colonial societies as well. It is time to redefine the concept of the plural colonial society, taking it beyond Furnivall's definition, by recognising that Asians and Europeans engaged in non-economic interactions as well as economic ones, and that Asian and European elites were much more closely socially integrated than, perhaps, they have been regarded heretofore by historians.

*The Cult of Raffles*

**Chapter Five:**

**Imperial Monarchy and the Theatre of Prestige in Colonial Singapore**

The ethnically diverse social structure of colonial Singapore was united at its apex by an institutional centre, in which Asian and European elites interacted and cooperated in conferring honours, expressing loyalty to their Crown and their Empire, creating and celebrating shared imagery and traditions, and including one another as members of prestigious organisations and participants in social events and public rituals – in other words, by engaging in reciprocal exchanges of symbolic capital to their mutual benefit. The network of institutions and institutional interactions – William Goode’s *prestige processes*<sup>1</sup> – formed and sustained this multiracial community of prestige by knitting the elites together into a cosmopolitan elite class. This elite institutional centre was what Edward Shils termed the *central institutional system*.<sup>2</sup> It was the central social focal point where the colonial social structure transcended what J.S. Furnivall termed the *plural society*,<sup>3</sup> and achieved an overarching cosmopolitan unity at the elite level. The organisations which made up the institutional network enabled elites to gain status, prestige, and publicity, as well as wealth and power; and this institutional network and its gatherings provided the social medium within which elites recognised one another as elites and cultivated social connections with each other.<sup>4</sup>

Asian and European elites associated with one another and cooperated in the creation and sharing of symbolic capital in the context of a network of prestigious

---

<sup>1</sup> See: William J. Goode, *The Celebration of Heroes: Prestige as a Social Control System*, especially pp. 209-211, and also pp. vii-x, 6, 13-18, 31, 33, 40, 41, 50, 93-95, 98, 101, 103, 110, 114, 116-117, 119-120, 125, 133, 151-152, and 180.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*, pp. 6, 12, 14, 15, 38, and 39.

<sup>3</sup> J.S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India*, p. 304. On pp. 303 and 305, Furnivall applied the concept of the *plural society* to other colonies in Asia.

<sup>4</sup> See: C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, p. 11.

institutions, including governmental and charitable organisations; corporations and chambers of commerce; civil society organisations; sporting and social clubs; and, at the top of the scale, there was the monarchy itself, represented here by the Governor<sup>5</sup> and by the occasional visits of travelling royalty. The imperial monarchy served as the icon of a civil religion,<sup>6</sup> in which the institution of British royalty was celebrated and venerated by Asian and Western elites and their governmental institutions, clubs, and other organisations. The imperial monarchy performed a central institutional and symbolic role in the cultivation of elite social capital among the Asian and European members of the colonial elite class, which transcended racial and cultural identities and socially integrated them into a cosmopolitan community of prestige. The vast array of respectable local organisations, including governmental institutions, civil-society associations, and social organisations, were linked together through overlapping memberships and by their participation in the civil religion of monarchy. The entire institutional network served as a system of status symbols, in which Asian and European elites could take part together, enhancing their own prestige as individuals while symbolically and socially integrating themselves into a multiracial community of prestige.

It is normal for individuals to want to associate themselves in groups, activities, and organisations, which provide them with non-material benefits, regardless of what material advantages such associations might also provide. The most basic benefit of

---

<sup>5</sup> Dato Sir Roland St. John Braddell, *The Law of the Straits Settlements: A Commentary* (1915; reprinted in 1982), p. 97.

<sup>6</sup> Regarding the concept of *civil religion*, see: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract or Principles of Political Right*, translated by Henry J. Tozer, Book IV, Chapter VIII, p. 227; Robert N. Bellah, *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World*; Steven Lukes, "Political Ritual and Social Integration," in: Steven Lukes, *Essays in Social Theory*, pp. 52-73; Richard K. Fenn, *Beyond Idols: The Shape of a Secular Society*; Anne Rowbottom, "'The Real Royalists': Folk Performance and Civil Religion at Royal Visits," *Folklore*, Volume 109 (1998), pp. 85-86; and: Gordon Marshall, editor, *A Dictionary of Sociology*, p. 73.

association is the enjoyment of a feeling of community and fellowship, the privilege of membership status in a gathering or an organisation which connects individuals to one another by grouping them, either in actual physical proximity or in an imaginary sense – all the members of an association can share some sense of fellowship, even if they never actually meet. Mass communications, such as newspapers and other publications that identify the members of the association to one another, can give individuals a sense of the extent of the membership of an organisation, even if they never actually meet one another or assemble together. The natural enjoyment in a sense of inclusion and belonging can be intensified by a sense of shared purpose of the association – for example, a commitment to public service, spiritual values, or patriotism – which gives individuals a sense of altruistic endeavour at the same time that they enjoy a sense of membership, inclusion, and engaging together in purposeful action for their own sake. Finally, the enjoyment of inclusion and community can be heightened still further by an element of distinction, by belonging to an exclusive grouping, an inner circle, or a special status, to which only a few can belong, and from which they gain a privileged reputation and ranking within their social context.<sup>7</sup> This is a self-reinforcing mechanism of social interaction: ambitious individuals crave distinction and status, and they have to work together to set themselves apart from the crowd; by working together as a team, they can mobilise their resources to make an impact upon the wider society around them – these elites can produce an noticeable effect upon society that is totally out of proportion to their limited numbers.

---

<sup>7</sup> See: Bernardo A. Huberman, Christoph H. Loch, and Ayse Öncüler, “Status As a Valued Resource,” *Social Psychology Quarterly*, Volume 67, Number 1 (March 2004), pp. 103-114.

## *Imperial Monarchy and the Theatre of Prestige*

Since ambitious individuals naturally wish to enjoy the feeling of self-importance and the recognition of their importance by others, they have to *make* themselves important to the wider society – both by actually making decisions that are significant beyond their own privileged circle, and by representing their status and importance to society through the publicity of spectacular rituals, conspicuous monuments, and mass communication. If it is publicly known that certain individuals participate in the making of important decisions, then they will be regarded as important people. Ambitious individuals can affirm their elite status by giving themselves both the reality and the public appearance of being leaders, of having functional importance to the wider society. This makes them into recognised leaders and *elites*, and can make their organisations and the offices they hold become the *elite* institutions at the centre of the society. The more that the social circle or network of these elites – their group or groups, their institutional system, their community or their class – become generally perceived as important and prestigious, the more that the institutions and activities of this social centre would attract both the continued participation and dedication of its incumbent leadership, as well as the recruitment other socially ambitious individuals as new members – thus perpetuating and reproducing the social structure over time. The enjoyment of a feeling of self-worth and self-importance, as well as public reputation and social honour, would compensate these individuals for their investment of time and effort in public leadership roles. Once the mechanism begins to function, its members and new recruits would be motivated to make it continue and grow over time.

This social mechanism has both vertical and horizontal social dimensions, in that socially ambitious individuals must cultivate a certain sense of equality amongst

themselves in order to promote their distinction relative to the rest of society. In order to create *vertical* social distance between themselves and the general public, elites and would-be elites must bring about *horizontal* social proximity among themselves, developing cohesive networks and institutions at the summit of society which integrate them into an elite class. To set themselves above and apart from the many, they must place themselves close together with an elite minority. To emphasise their difference from the masses in terms of social prominence and rank, they must focus their attention on their similarities with their fellow elites, their mutual goals and motivations, including their shared interest in symbolic capital. To *be* an elite, as well as to function successfully in a leadership role, each individual needs elite allies, and to cultivate such alliances, they must find a way to interact in a context of approximate equality of status, in which their alliance will be mutually beneficial in status terms – after all, why would an ambitious individual participate in an alliance over any length of time, if it means a one-sided distribution of rewards where one partner in the exchange is thereby kept in an inferior position? A team or network is strengthened by a sense of partnership among its participants, and partnership is fostered by a sense of equality and mutual benefit, a stable pattern of mutually-beneficial exchange.<sup>8</sup>

The need to cultivate a sense of partnership and equality in terms of status, which can foster the development of social integration through the exchange of symbolic capital, is, perhaps, especially important in a society which is culturally diverse, where the elites may not share the same national or ethnic identity, or even the same language. Such was the case in colonial Singapore, where Asian and Western elites interacted and

---

<sup>8</sup> Regarding the status equality of partners in social exchange, see: Peter P. Ekeh, *Social Exchange Theory: The Two Traditions*, pp. 48-49, 51-52, and 56-57.

cooperated not only in the economic realm (as emphasised in the Furnivallian notion of the plural colonial society), but also in the social realm of symbolic capital. By giving each other social honours, and by accepting honours that were distributed the Crown, these Asian and European elites set themselves apart as socially distanced from the general population, and yet simultaneously located themselves together in social proximity at the centre of the society. The social mechanism of the interracial cooperation of elites in the creation and exchange of social capital both socially distanced them those non-elites with whom they shared *cultural* affinities, while socially combining them with those fellow elites of other races with whom they shared *status* affinities, despite the cultural distance between them. Symbolic capital provided elites of different races with a mutually comprehensible language, which allowed them to integrate as a cohesive community of prestige. The cultivation of social linkages of acquaintanceship among these elites and the development of their reputations likely complemented their economic interactions on the Raffles Place side of the river, since a social context of interlocking networks of acquaintanceships and mutual recognition of reputations could provide a social medium that was conducive to some sense of mutual trust, a useful context within which elites could do business with one another.

Asian and European elites in colonial Singapore affirmed and enhanced their prestige and status by associating with one another in the ritual celebrations of the monarchy which occurred from time to time, and by receiving honours from the Crown, either directly, in the form of royal honours, or indirectly, in the form of conspicuous inclusion and participation in celebrations, rituals, and institutions connected with the



monarchy. The Crown was the fountain or source of all official honour;<sup>9</sup> some elites in Singapore received honours directly from the monarchy, such as knighthoods and orders of chivalry.<sup>10</sup> For example, Queen Victoria appointed the Cantonese naval contractor Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa a Companion of the Order of St. Michael and St. George, or CMG, in 1876.<sup>11</sup> King George V made Tan Jiak Kim a CMG in 1912, and in 1918 the King appointed Mrs. Lee Choon Guan a Member of the Order of the British Empire, or MBE,<sup>12</sup> and Dr. Lim Boon Keng an Officer of the Order of the British Empire, or OBE.<sup>13</sup> King George V created Song Ong Siang first a CBE in 1927, and then a Knight of the British Empire, or KBE, in 1936; for the rest of his life, the first Malayan Chinese knight was known as Sir Ong Siang Song.<sup>14</sup> King George VI created Sir Han Hoe Lim a knight in 1946,<sup>15</sup> honoured Sir Husein Hasanally Abdoolcader of Penang with a knighthood in 1948,<sup>16</sup> and knighted Tun Dato Sir Cheng Lock Tan of Malacca in 1952.<sup>17</sup> In 1958, Queen Elizabeth II created Sir George Oehlers the first and only Eurasian knight in colonial Singapore.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Sir William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England. Book the First*, p. 261.

<sup>10</sup> See the list of honours in: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power*, p. 16.

<sup>11</sup> *Straits Times*, 13 May 1876, p. 2, NUS microfilm reel R0016425.

<sup>12</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 542.

<sup>13</sup> C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership*, p. 16; *Singapore Free Press*, May 21, 1919, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Regarding the knighthood of Sir Ong Siang Song KBE, see: *Malaya Tribune*, 2 January 1936, pp. 10 and 12, and 3 January 1936, p. 10, NUS microfilm R0005931; *British Malaya* magazine, January 1936, p. 210; February 1936, p. 237; and November 1941, p. 99.

<sup>15</sup> C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership*, p. 96, endnote 17, and p. 307, endnote 14.

<sup>16</sup> Grace Chia Beng Imm, "Asian Members of the Straits Settlements Legislative Council (1908-1941)." An Academic Exercise Presented as Part Requirement for The Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honours in History. Department of History, University of Malaya, Singapore, 1960, pp. 55-57.

<sup>17</sup> Datin Patricia Lim Pui Huen, *The Tan Cheng Lock Papers: A Descriptive List. A New and Enlarged Edition*, pp. xx, 179, and 275.

<sup>18</sup> Francisca and Jacinta Cardoza, "They Made Their Mark: Prominent Eurasians in Singapore's History," in: Myrna Braga-Blake, ed., with co-researcher Ann Ebert-Oehlers, pp. 87-88. See also: *Colony of Singapore Government Gazette Extraordinary*, Vol. XIII, No. 57, 12 June 1958, Notification No. 1378.

Many other elites received various honours which were also derived from the monarchy, since they came from the governor, who represented the Crown.<sup>19</sup> The Crown – through the Governors – granted Asian and European elites the titles of *Legislative Councillor*, *Municipal Commissioner*,<sup>20</sup> *Justice of the Peace*,<sup>21</sup> and *Magistrate*,<sup>22</sup> as well as memberships in the Chinese, Hindu, Mahomedan, and Sikh Advisory Boards, the Harbour Board, the Council of the King Edward VII Medical School,<sup>23</sup> the Rent Assessment Board,<sup>24</sup> and the board of trustees of the Singapore Improvement Trust. When these appointments were made known to the recipients' fellow elites and to the general public through publication in the official *Straits Settlements Government Gazette* and the local newspapers, as well as in the annual local directories, the prestige value of these honours was enhanced through publicity and, presumably, the respect and deference accorded to these elites.

This process of the conferral and acceptance of colonial honours involved the reciprocal exchange of prestige and recognition of status – as elites were honoured with titles and seats on boards and committees, so too were the prestige of these titles and these institutions themselves enhanced through their association with high-status individuals, which, in turn, increased the desirability of these honours for aspiring elites. For one to receive certain honours, belong to certain prestigious organisations, and

---

<sup>19</sup> Dato Sir Roland St. John Braddell, *The Law of the Straits Settlements: A Commentary* (1915; reprinted in 1982), p. 97.

<sup>20</sup> Regarding Chinese Legislative Councillors and Municipal Commissioners, see: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership*, pp. 306-307, endnote 13.

<sup>21</sup> See: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership*, p. 16.

<sup>22</sup> See: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership*, p. 14.

<sup>23</sup> On the King Edward VII Medical School Council, see: Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 367.

<sup>24</sup> On the Rent Assessment Board, see: Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 545. In February 1919, the Rent Assessment Board included A.M.S. Angullia, E.A. Elias, Gaw Khok Kiam, Koh San Hin, and E. Tessensohn (a leading Eurasian Singaporean), as well as the Hon. C.J. Saunders and H. Carpmael – *Malaya Tribune*, 5 February 1919, p. 5, R0005815.

participate in certain gatherings and rituals, all meant that one was publicly recognised as enjoying high status and prestige, as well as membership in the colonial elite class. By accepting colonial honours and participating in prestigious colonial institutions and rituals, Asian elites thereby publicly endorsed and validated the colonial social and political structure and its system of status symbols, which provided the central focal point of the colonial society. The symbolic importance of the acceptance of colonial honours by Asian elites, as demonstrations of their endorsement and cooperative acceptance of the colonial system through their sharing in its symbolic rewards, was highlighted in India in the early 1920s, when Mahatma Gandhi urged his fellow Indians to return any imperial honours which they had received, as a form of non-cooperation and a step towards Indian independence.<sup>25</sup>

The social and symbolic integration of the colonial social structure by means of the flow of symbolic capital is exemplified by the public achievements of Tan Kah Kee, a wealthy China-born Hokkien businessman, community leader, and philanthropist, whose many public-spirited achievements included the founding of the Singapore Chinese High School in 1918. In addition to enhancing his status through public service, Tan Kah Kee also accepted honours from the colonial state, including appointment as a Justice of the Peace in 1918,<sup>26</sup> and being given a seat on the Chinese Advisory Board in 1923.<sup>27</sup> Tan Kah Kee not only experienced the enrichment of his own prestige and status due to receiving these colonial honours, but he also returned the favour by choosing to take part in the colonial political and symbolic systems; he made his own gift of prestige and

---

<sup>25</sup> See: Bernard S. Cohn, "Representing Authority in Victorian India," in: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, editors, *The Invention of Tradition*, p. 209.

<sup>26</sup> C.F. Yong, *Tan Kah-kee*, pp. 120-121.

<sup>27</sup> C.F. Yong, *Tan Kah-kee*, p. 121.

legitimation to the colonial state, and to its system of status symbols and honours, by means of his readiness to be publicly linked with this system and this state. This was a reciprocal exchange of symbolic capital between a Chinese community leader and the colonial system, an exchange which was mutually beneficial in terms of the symbolic capital of prestige and the social legitimation of authority. Since Tan Kah Kee was socially recognised as a top leader within the local Chinese community, his social and symbolic integration into the colonial system meant that the social structures of the Chinese masses were also integrated and incorporated into the colonial system, in part through him.

Tan Kah Kee implicitly recognised the legitimacy of the colonial state, and its worthiness to confer honours upon a Chinese community leader such as himself. By doing so, he set an example for other Chinese elites to follow, showing them that the way to social status and prestige included showing deference and respect for the colonial state, and taking part in its system of status symbols and honours. In effect, Tan Kah Kee was giving advice to the Chinese leaders of Singapore, which was the opposite of the advice that Mahatma Gandhi was giving in India at about the same time.

Another form of honour that was indirectly derived from the imperial crown was the commemoration of the names of elites by naming streets after them. As streets in Singapore were named after Asian and European elites, the names of prominent local Arabs, Chinese, Indians, Jews, and Malays were symbolically linked with the names of their European fellow elites (including businessmen and prominent colonial officials), as well as with royalty, imperial heroes, and the famous British victories at Waterloo and Trafalgar. This form of honour emphasised the linkage between Asian and European

elites, and the inclusion of local Asian businessmen in the multiracial elite class, in a way which was visible to everyone in Singapore – or, at least, to anyone who could read the English or Romanised names of the streets. Street naming was a durable form of honour, which symbolically associated Asian elites with the most prominent and highest-ranking European elites. It was also, indirectly at least, a royal honour, since the authority for naming streets was ultimately derived from the Crown: the streets were named by the Municipal Commissioners, whose offices, like all other colonial offices, titles, honours, and governmental institutions, ultimately derived their authority and legitimacy from the imperial monarchy. Street names publicly expressed the association and shared membership of Asian and European elites in the multiracial elite class, and suggested that the colonial system was about Asian elites at least as much as it was about European elites. The practice of street naming provided a durable and public record of Asian and European elite cooperation – a conspicuous monument commemorating their mutually beneficial colonial joint enterprise.<sup>28</sup>

The most direct form of royal honour for Asian and European elites was probably their formal presentation to royalty, either in Britain or during the occasional royal visits to Singapore. When Asian and European businessmen and ladies were introduced to royalty, they were, in a sense, put on the same level of the other people who were also presented to royalty, such as members of other royal families, and high-ranking officials. For example, when British princes visited Singapore and Malaya, they met with Malay sultans, as well as colonial officials and local Asian and European leaders. The tradition of formal receptions and presentations was also followed on at least some occasions

---

<sup>28</sup> I am grateful to A/P Maurizio Peleggi for discussing street names with me in 2003, and for urging me to read Rajpal Singh's thought-provoking thesis, "Street Naming & The Construction Of The Colonial Narrative In Singapore: 1819-1942."

during the visits to Singapore of certain important visitors who were not British royalty. Important visitors over the years included Austrian,<sup>29</sup> Dutch,<sup>30</sup> French,<sup>31</sup> German,<sup>32</sup> Hawaiian,<sup>33</sup> Italian,<sup>34</sup> Japanese,<sup>35</sup> Russian,<sup>36</sup> Siamese,<sup>37</sup> and Swedish royalty,<sup>38</sup> as well as two former non-royal national leaders: Ulysses Grant<sup>39</sup> and Georges Clemenceau.<sup>40</sup> The honouring of visiting dignitaries from outside the Empire further emphasised the importance of the lavish honours accorded to visiting British royalty from time to time, as well as highlighting the symbolic or prestige value of the honour given to local Asian and European elites when they were presented to royalty.

Royalty was connected with some of the shared experiences and collective memories which fostered the identity and cohesion of the multiracial elite class. The experience of meeting visiting princes was a *shared experience* among local Asian and European elites, which helped to reinforce their sense of shared membership in the cosmopolitan elite class, as well as the public image of the multiracial nature of this community of prestige. The presentation of Asian and European elites to royalty contributed to the *shared collective memory* of the multiracial elite class, together with memories of their participation together in celebrations of royalty in Singapore, such as

---

<sup>29</sup> In April 1893; see: *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser Weekly Mail Edition*, 2 January 1894, p. 435, R0006042.

<sup>30</sup> C.B. Buckley, p. 317.

<sup>31</sup> Makepeace et al., Volume Two, p. 600.

<sup>32</sup> *Straits Times*, January 2, 1900, p. 2; January 3, p. 3; January 4, p. 2; January 5, p. 3; January 6, pp. 2 and 3; January 12, p. 3; January 15, p. 3; and January 16, p. 2; R0016463; Makepeace, et al., Vol. 2, p. 594.

<sup>33</sup> Regarding the visit of King Kalakaua in 1881, see: *Singapore Daily Times*, 6 May 1881, p. 2; 7 May, p. 2; 10 May, p. 2; 11 May, p. 2; 12 May, pp. 2 and 3; and 13 May, p. 2; R0010198.

<sup>34</sup> *Straits Times Overland Journal*, 8 July pp. 1 and 6; and 16 July 1879, pp. 1 and 7, R0006771.

<sup>35</sup> *Prewar Japanese Community in Singapore – Picture and Record*, pp. 181-195 and 226-231.

<sup>36</sup> Makepeace et al., Vol. 2, pp. 591 and 600.

<sup>37</sup> In 1871, 1890, 1907, and 1929; see: Jarman, ed., *Annual Reports*, Vol. 3, p. 536; Vol. 5, p. 680; and Vol. 9, p. 331.

<sup>38</sup> See the account of various royal visits in: *The Singapore Free Press*, 1 April 1922, p. 7, R0006149.

<sup>39</sup> See the list of the Asian and European guests who attended the reception in honour of General Grant at Government House, in: *Straits Times Overland Journal*, 5 April 1879, p. 2, R0006771.

<sup>40</sup> Sir Laurence Guillemard, *Trivial Fond Records*, p. 143.

coronation and jubilee celebrations, and the annual royal birthday celebrations at Government House to which local elites of various races were invited.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, the receptions at Government House called *At Homes* provided another source of collective memories shared by Asian and European elites<sup>42</sup> – for example, in the 1920s, J.S.M. Rennie recalled the distinctive costumes of the Arabs and Chinese who attended the monthly *At Homes* at Government House over twenty years earlier, at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>43</sup> Invitations to these social functions at Government House were themselves a form of social honour – indeed, they were linked to the monarchy, since the host was the Governor, who represented the monarchy.<sup>44</sup> Such honours were enhanced by the publication of the Government House guest lists in the newspapers.

The conferral of these honours not only symbolically linked these elites *vertically* to the monarchy at the imperial centre (as David Cannadine has explained so clearly in his book *Ornamentalism*),<sup>45</sup> but also helped to link these Asian and European elites to one another at the imperial periphery through *horizontal* social connections, by bringing them together within shared identities of status and honour despite their cultural differences. The elites mutually recognised their shared elite social status as they held offices in institutions and participated together in social functions and public celebrations.<sup>46</sup> The symbolic capital which they gained from these titles and institutional offices helped to set them apart from the masses, and united them as a community of

---

<sup>41</sup> See George Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, p. 36, and the photograph facing p. 78.

<sup>42</sup> For example, see: *Singapore Free Press*, 16 July 1919, p. 6, R0006132.

<sup>43</sup> J.S.M. Rennie, *Musings of J.S.M.R. Mostly Malayan*, pp. 61-62 and 104. See also the list of the Asian and Europeans at the *At Home* in honour of General Grant, in: *Straits Times Overland Journal*, 5 April 1879, p. 2, R0006771.

<sup>44</sup> Dato Sir Roland St. John Braddell, *The Law of the Straits Settlements: A Commentary* (1915; reprinted in 1982), p. 97.

<sup>45</sup> I am grateful to A/P Maurizio Peleggi for urging me to read *Ornamentalism* in 2003.

<sup>46</sup> Regarding committees and mutual recognition among elites involved in public events, see: Samuel Kinser, *Carnival, American Style: Mardi Gras at New Orleans and Mobile*, p. 94.

elites, much as Anthony Milner has explained how the elites in traditional Malay polities were united as they enhanced the prestige or *nama* of their sultans and enjoyed the enhancement of their own prestige in return.<sup>47</sup> Asian and European elites in colonial Singapore not only received honour from the Crown and the government – they also received honour from one another, through association with one another in membership and leadership in institutions and through participation in social events and public rituals; these interactions constituted reciprocal exchanges of symbolic capital among the members of the cosmopolitan community of elites. Prestige and status are inherently *contagious*;<sup>48</sup> the colonial elites could enhance their social standing and reputation through association with other elites, especially those with even greater prestige.<sup>49</sup> Association with elites through inclusion in their gatherings was an important form of symbolic capital which these elites could offer to one another. All elites could potentially enhance their prestige through these social exchanges, though some, perhaps, more successfully than others.

The participation of elites in royal celebrations involved the enhancement of their symbolic capital through publicity and exchange, as well as the cultivation of the solidarity of their class. The degree of honour given to elites by including them in royal celebrations could be enhanced through the publicity given to these events and the attendance of individual elites. The names of Asian and European elites who were honoured by being invited to royal celebrations at Government House could be made known to the public through their publication in the newspapers – as happened, for

---

<sup>47</sup> See: Anthony Milner, *Kerajaan*, pp. 105, 106, 108, 109, 110, 113, and 114.

<sup>48</sup> On the *contagiousness* of prestige, see: Emile Benoit-Smullyan, “Status, Status Types, and Status Interrelations.” *American Sociological Review*, Volume 9, Number 2 (April 1944), p. 157. Compare with: Robert W. Fuller, *Somebodies and Nobodies*, p. 75.

<sup>49</sup> See: Robert W. Fuller, *Somebodies and Nobodies*, p. 75.



example, during the celebrations of the Golden and Diamond Jubilees of Queen Victoria in 1887 and 1897 respectively,<sup>50</sup> the coronation of King George V in 1911,<sup>51</sup> and the joint coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth (the parents of Queen Elizabeth II) in 1937.<sup>52</sup> This was also an example of the reciprocal exchange of symbolic capital among the elites: European official elites honoured Asian and European business and professional elites by inviting them to social functions at Government House; the private sector elites honoured the public sector elites by accepting the invitations; all of them honoured the Crown together, and they received prestige collectively and as individuals by being named in the guest lists which were published in the newspapers, thus publicly identifying at least some of the people who were members of the multiracial elite class at a particular point in time. While the elites gained symbolic capital individually, the class as a whole gained by publicly asserting its prestige, as well as in terms of its social capital or cohesiveness, as these events gave its members opportunities for networking and a sense of shared experience and identity, and, afterwards, of shared memory as well. Shared experience, identity, and memory could all contribute to their sense of being members of a multiracial community of elites.

The shared status and sense of elite class membership or identity bridged the cultural and racial boundaries within the elite class, and emphasised the fact that they were alike in the sense of asserting their prestige and recognising one another's claims to

---

<sup>50</sup> See the lists of Asian and European guests who attended social functions together at Government House in honour of the Golden and Diamond Jubilees of Queen Victoria, in: *Straits Times* (weekly issue), 6 July 1887, p. 11, R0011435; and: *Straits Times*, 25 June 1897, p. 3, R0016457.

<sup>51</sup> See the guest list published in: *Straits Times*, 23 June 1911, p. 7, R0016518.

<sup>52</sup> See the guest list of a dinner at Government House on 13 May 1937, in: *Malaya Tribune*, 20 May 1937, p. 10, R0005944.

elite social status.<sup>53</sup> This shared emphasis on symbolic capital and the frequent exchanges of prestige among the elites reinforced the cohesion and social capital of their class, since they each had a stake in the continuity of the social system and the patterns of interactions, social exchanges,<sup>54</sup> and mutual recognitions, which constituted their social game<sup>55</sup> and sustained the cohesion of their class.<sup>56</sup> Prestige exists within the realm of social reality; the elite status of each individual relies on being recognised by other elite individuals and on *their* relative prestige.<sup>57</sup>

The celebration of royalty by means of the creation and enhancement of prestigious imagery connected with the tradition and heritage of the monarchy, resembled the celebration of Raffles. Asian and European elites publicly celebrated the monarchy on the occasions of royal birthdays, royal visits, jubilee celebrations, and coronations. Individual monarchs were commemorated through the appearance of their portraits in public buildings and on local coins, banknotes, and postage stamps, and through attachment of their names and the names of their family members to streets, buildings,

---

<sup>53</sup> Regarding Asian and European elites mutually recognising one another's social status, see: David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*, pp. 100 and 126.

<sup>54</sup> Regarding social exchange, see: Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, pp. 387 and 389; Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, p. 175; Marcel Mauss, *The Gift (Essai sur le don)*, p. 10 and 11; Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship (Les Structures Élémentaires de la Parenté)*, pp. 59-60 and 68; Peter M. Blau, *Exchange and Power in Social Life*, pp. 4, 89, 92, and 107; Alvin W. Gouldner, "The Norm of Reciprocity: A Preliminary Statement." *American Sociological Review*, Volume 25, Number 2 (April 1960), pp. 161-178; and: Pierre Bourdieu, "The Economy of Symbolic Goods," in: *Practical Reason*, pp. 100 and 104.

<sup>55</sup> Regarding the concept of a *social game*, see: E. Digby Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class*, pp. 11-12; Peter Burke, *The Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society in Italy*, p. 194; Norton E. Long, "The Local Community as an Ecology of Games." *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (November 1958), p. 261; David Silverman, *The Theory of Organisations: A Sociological Framework*, pp. 210-212; and: Harvey Warren Zorbaugh, *The Gold Coast and the Slum: A Sociological Study of Chicago's Near North Side*, pp. 49-64 and 279. See also the mention of the *game of honour* in: Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, p. 22.

<sup>56</sup> See: Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power," in: *Sociological Theory*, Volume 7, Number 1 (Spring 1989), p. 23; Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, p. 135; and: Pierre Bourdieu, "What Makes a Social Class? On The Theoretical and Practical Existence Of Groups," in: *Berkeley Journal of Sociology: A Critical Review*, Volume XXXII, 1987, p. 15.

<sup>57</sup> See: Peter Blau, *Exchange and Power in Social Life*, p. 133, and: Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, p. 22.

institutions, and places in Singapore, such as Victoria Memorial Hall, Empress Place, and Queenstown. All of these images and references served as constant public reminders of royal prestige, as David Cannadine has noted; and they helped to sustain the symbolic capital of royal imagery in the eyes of the local public – in other words, to keep royal prestige socially real in colonial Singapore.<sup>58</sup> The greater the prestige of royalty in Singapore, the greater the local prestige of those elites who were associated with royalty through the receipt of honours. This helped to set the elites apart as a special class, to reduce the social distance between them and place them together in the same locale in the colonial social space, and to enhance their social cohesion and collective elite identity.

Every time the imperial monarchy was celebrated in Singapore – whether in spectacular public rituals, the names of buildings and places, or the pages of printed publications – the prestige of the imperial monarchy as an important component of the *local* system of status symbols was thereby confirmed and reaffirmed in the eyes of the local population, and most especially in the eyes of the elites and aspiring elites who were most likely to receive such messages. This process fostered a version of the Matthew Effect, in which the more the monarchy was honoured in the local context, the more it attracted further veneration, and thus perpetuated the belief in the symbolic prestige value of the monarchy and royal imagery across the generations.<sup>59</sup> While many people – especially elites – continued to celebrate the monarchy year after year, and at least some of them derived prestige benefits from their participation in this colonial civic religion, they thereby contributed to a sense of *centricity* within the multiracial colonial society, by *pooling* symbolic capital into the system of symbols associated with the imperial

---

<sup>58</sup> See: David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*, pp. 103-104.

<sup>59</sup> See: Robert K. Merton, “The Matthew Effect in Science,” in: Robert K. Merton, *The Sociology of Science: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations*, pp. 439-459.

crown.<sup>60</sup> As these elites took part together in affirming the location of the royal institution and its symbolism at the core of the colonial system of status symbols, they also asserted their own location together in the centre of the colonial society, and symbolically integrated themselves as fellow members of the multiracial community of prestige.

Local Chinese leaders promoted one of the more noteworthy celebrations of royalty here in the nineteenth century. At the time of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887, thirty-five Chinese in Singapore, led by a Legislative Councillor, the Hon. Seah Liang Seah, donated the funds to commission a marble statue of the Queen.<sup>61</sup> Edward Geflowski sculpted the statue in Britain, and it was shown to the Prince and Princess of Wales (later King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra) and their son Prince George (later King George V) before being shipped to Singapore at the end of 1888.<sup>62</sup> The unveiling of the statue was announced in the local Chinese-language newspaper *Lat Pau*,<sup>63</sup> in addition to being reported in the English-language *Straits Times*. Governor Sir Cecil Clementi Smith unveiled the statue in the ballroom at Government House in February 1889, in a ceremony attended by Chinese elites, including Cheang Hong Lim, Lee Cheng Yan, Tan Kim Ching, Tan Jiak Kim, and Hoo Ah Yip Whampoa (the son of the late Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa, CMG). After the Governor made a speech praising the devotion of the Chinese to Queen Victoria, the Hon. Seah Liang Seah spoke on behalf of the Chinese, expressing their loyalty to the Queen.<sup>64</sup> The significance of the statue was likely heightened by the fact that it was out of the ordinary in the local context – in 1897, G.T.

---

<sup>60</sup> On the concepts of *centricity* and *pooling*, see: Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, pp. 188-190.

<sup>61</sup> *Straits Times* (weekly issue), 15 June 1887, pp. 7 and 8, NUS microfilm R0011435.

<sup>62</sup> *Straits Times*, 17 January 1889, p. 2, NUS microfilm reel R0016441.

<sup>63</sup> *Lat Pau*, 27 February 1889, p. 2, NUS microfilm reel ZR00696.

<sup>64</sup> *Straits Times*, 26 February 1889, p. 2, NUS microfilm reel R0016441.

Hare, the Assistant Protector of Chinese in Singapore, noted that this monument was the *only* statue of Queen Victoria that the Colony owned.<sup>65</sup>

Published accounts made knowledge of this event available to the public and to succeeding generations. The report in the *Lat Pau* made information on the unveiling ceremony available to the Chinese-educated section of the population. The *Straits Times* carried a step-by-step account of the story of the statue, with articles reporting its sculpting by Edward Geflowski, its display to the future Kings Edward VII and George V, and to the future Queen Alexandra, its expected arrival, its delivery by the steamer *Cardiganshire*, the unveiling ceremony at Government House, the texts of the speeches by Governor Sir Cecil Clementi Smith and the Hon. Seah Liang Seah, the list of the names of the Chinese elites who attended the ceremony, and the text of the inscription on the statue's pedestal. A photo taken on the occasion of the ceremony – showing the Chinese gentlemen formally attired in their honorary mandarin robes and hats, together with the Governor dressed in a frock coat and the statue of the Queen wearing a crown and holding an orb and a sceptre – was included in *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, written by Song Ong Siang (later Sir Ong Siang Song) and published in 1923.<sup>66</sup> This book also chronicled the unveiling ceremony, including the texts of the Hon. Seah Liang Seah's speech and the inscription on the pedestal. This inscription credited the Chinese community in Singapore with the presentation of the statue, and was available to be read over the years not only in Sir Ong Siang Song's book, but also by all of the guests who viewed the statue when they attended the many ceremonies and social functions which occurred frequently at Government House for the

---

<sup>65</sup> G.T. Hare, quoted in: Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, p. 191.

<sup>66</sup> The photo is facing p. 249, and the description of the unveiling ceremony is on pp. 249-250.

next seventy years following the statue's unveiling – with the exception of the Japanese occupation from 1942 to 1945, when the statue was consigned to Raffles Museum.<sup>67</sup>

The statue of Queen Victoria was returned to Government House following the war. Once again, guests at Government House could view the statue and read the inscription. Photos taken at Government House in the 1950s show that the statue was still there, and that visitors sometimes posed in front of it to have their pictures taken.<sup>68</sup> The statue was removed from the palace after the end of the colonial era. Government House became the Istana, the palace of the Yang di-Pertuan Negara or Head of State from 1959 to 1965, and of the President of the Republic of Singapore from 1965 onwards. By the early twenty-first century, the statue stood within a small shelter in the presidential garden. Thus, the local Chinese elites of the late 1880s had succeeded in symbolically connecting themselves with the monarchy by means of an artefact which was still prominently displayed and available for viewing by guests at Government House seven decades later, and which may still be seen by visitors to the Istana today, in a place of honour surrounded by tropical flowers.

Celebrations of royalty benefited the Asian and European elites both symbolically and socially, by enhancing their personal prestige through their association with prestigious imagery, and by promoting the cohesion of the elite class as a socially integrated and prestigious multiracial social group or community. At the same time, these celebrations involved a reciprocal exchange of prestige, as the cosmopolitan elite class enriched and enhanced the prestige value of the monarchy through the celebration of royalty. The celebration and commemoration of royalty enhanced and sustained the

---

<sup>67</sup> E.J.H. Corner, *The Marquis: A Tale of Syonan-to*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>68</sup> These photos are now in the collection of the National Archives of Singapore, Accession Numbers: 66960, 67433, 69539, 71530, and 71585.

local symbolic value of royalty as an imperial label which could be attached (something like a *brand name*) to the Asian and European elites and to their activities and institutions; thus royalty, like the name of Raffles, could serve as a resource of symbolic capital to be exchanged among the elites and to socially link them together in a multiracial elite community.

Royal celebrations – royal birthdays, coronations, jubilees, and royal visits – these events brought all of the institutions connected with royalty together in public celebration, interaction, and display – the Volunteers, the Clubs, the schools, the Freemasons; the Legislative Councillors and Municipal Commissioners, the knights, the OBEs and MBEs, the Justices of the Peace – and all reported in the newspapers and commemorated in the naming of buildings, institutions (such as Victoria School and the King Edward VII College of Medicine), streets, places (Kent Ridge; Empress Place; Victoria Memorial Hall, Elizabeth Walk, Queenstown). Local elites were included in this field or theatre of prestige as their names were listed near, next to or beneath the names of royalty and their representatives (the governors), in the local directories, the Who's Who books, the newspaper reports of celebrations, social events, and meetings; and in the street grid itself, where the names of local elites (Tan Tock Seng Hospital, Kim Seng, Hong Lim Green, Boon Keng, Boon Tat Street, Eu Tong Sen Street, Tessensohn, Almeida) were commemorated in street names, alongside streets and places named after royalty (Empress Place, Victoria Memorial Hall, Elizabeth Walk) and the names of officials who were representatives of the monarchy (Raffles Place, Fullerton Building, Guillemard Road, Clifford Pier, Clementi Road, Shenton Way) and imperial military heroes (Anson Road, Havelock Road, Outram Road, Kitchener) and the names of the

scenes of naval and military victories of the British Empire (Waterloo Street, Trafalgar Street).<sup>69</sup>

The institutional realm was crucial to the identification of elites and the public confirmation of their status as members of the multiracial elite class, as well as providing opportunities for interactions and exchanges of prestige among them. The largely *achieved* nature of elite status here heightened the importance of the status-conferring function of institutions to the elite class. Whereas in traditional societies, such as in medieval Europe and in pre-modern Asian cultures, elite status traditionally took the form of ascribed rank symbolised by titles of nobility and genealogical claims to noble lineages, in colonial Singapore, elite status for the most part took the form of the achieved status of membership and titles of office in prestigious organisations – the Legislative Council, the Municipal Commission, the Advisory Boards, the Chambers of Commerce, and various other prestigious boards, committees, organisations, associations, and clubs. While participation in these organisations allowed elites to meet one another, certain print media – especially the newspapers and the annual directories – publicised the identities and rank of the leaders of these institutions not only to their fellow elites, but also to the general reading public. Local English-language newspapers circulated from 1824 onwards, annual directories first appeared in 1846, and by the 1880s there were newspapers in the Chinese, Tamil, and Malay languages.

The development of the institutional network linking Asian and European elites involved the growth of a range of prestigious organisations in which the leaders of the different races interacted with one another. When the Singapore Chamber of Commerce

---

<sup>69</sup> I am grateful to A/P Maurizio Peleggi for discussing street names with me in 2003, and for urging me to read Rajpal Singh's thought-provoking thesis, "Street Naming & The Construction Of The Colonial Narrative In Singapore: 1819-1942."



was founded in 1837, it was a cosmopolitan organisation,<sup>70</sup> including Chinese and other Asian business elites as well as Europeans.<sup>71</sup> It is significant that, when the Chamber was founded, Edward Boustead asked Munshi Abdullah to translate the rules of the Chamber into Malay, and Abdullah was asked to read this translation at a meeting of the Asian and European members of the Chamber in 1837; this may have been done for the benefit of Malay-speaking Chinese Babas who joined the Chamber.

The multiracial membership of the first Committee of the Singapore Chamber of Commerce in 1837 included Chee Kim Guan, So Guan Chuan, Syed Abubakar, and Isaiah Zechariah, as well as several Westerners, including Edward Boustead, the Scottish merchants A.L. Johnston and Alexander Guthrie, and the American Consul Joseph Balestier.<sup>72</sup> Seah Eu Chin, who immigrated to Singapore from China in 1823, joined the Singapore Chamber of Commerce in 1840.<sup>73</sup> However, the Chinese apparently ceased to be involved in this Chamber around 1860.<sup>74</sup> By this time, the Chinese had established their own prestigious organisations in Singapore. There does not seem to be any evidence that the Chinese leaders were forced out of the Singapore Chamber of Commerce.<sup>75</sup> Perhaps they simply decided to turn their attention to other prestigious

---

<sup>70</sup> See the regulations and list of committee members, quoted from the minutes of a meeting of the Singapore Chamber of Commerce on 20 February 1837, in: T.J. Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account of the British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca*, Volume I, pp. 391-395.

<sup>71</sup> See, for example, the list of members of the Singapore Chamber of Commerce in the 1849 edition of *The Singapore Almanack, and Directory*, p. 26 (R0011768): the list includes Arab, Chinese, German, Jewish, Parsi, and Scottish names. See also: Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 40-41 and 46.

<sup>72</sup> See: the minutes of a meeting of the Singapore Chamber of Commerce on 20 February 1837, reprinted in: T.J. Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account of the British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca*, Volume I, pp. 391-395; C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, pp. 313-314; and: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 29.

<sup>73</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 20.

<sup>74</sup> Chiang Hai Ding, *A History of Straits Settlements Foreign Trade 1870-1915*, p. 222; Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 114.

<sup>75</sup> Chiang Hai Ding has suggested that the withdrawal of the Chinese from the Chamber was due to disagreements with the Europeans; see: Chiang Hai Ding, *A History of Straits Settlements Foreign Trade 1870-1915*, pp. 221-223, and 229. It may be impossible to determine with certainty the reason why the

organisations of their own making, within which they could interact more comfortably amongst themselves, with their fellow businessmen who spoke the same Chinese dialects or Baba Malay, rather than with the predominantly English-speaking European members of the Singapore Chamber of Commerce. Language was an important issue; C.F. Yong has pointed out that, even as late as the early decades of the twentieth century, most of the leaders of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce could not communicate in English, as most of them were immigrants who had been born and educated in China.<sup>76</sup>

The Chinese residents of Singapore had established an array of associations of their own by 1860, when the Chong-san Seng-chai, the last Chinese firm to belong to the Singapore Chamber of Commerce, ceased its membership in the Chamber.<sup>77</sup> When Chinese first arrived in the Settlement of Singapore, they brought with them a long heritage of the establishment of associations in China, a heritage upon which they could rely for time-honoured models and inspiration for their development of Chinese institutions in Singapore; hence, they certainly did not need the *ang moh* residents to teach them the concept of founding associations.<sup>78</sup> In fact, the Chinese apparently formed at least three associations on this island before the Raffles Club, the first European club in Singapore, was founded in 1825.<sup>79</sup> It would seem that the first Chinese association in this Settlement was the Ts'ao Chia Kuan, an organisation for the members

---

Chinese left the Chamber, since, according to Chiang Hai Ding (p. 221), the Chamber's records from the mid-nineteenth century no longer exist.

<sup>76</sup> C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, pp. 62, 64-65, 66, 73, 74, and 87.

<sup>77</sup> Regarding the Chong-san Seng-chai, see: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 114; Sir Ong Siang Song mentioned that the partners in this firm were Lim Seng Chai, See Eng Wat, and Wee Chong Seng.

<sup>78</sup> See the information on the history of *hui-kuan* in: William T. Rowe, *Hankow: Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1796-1889* (1984), p. 259.

<sup>79</sup> Regarding the founding of the Raffles Club on 30 June 1825, see: *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British India and its Dependencies*, Vol. XXI, No. 124, April 1826, pp. 529-530, quoting an article which appeared in the *Singapore Chronicle* of 21 July 1825.

of the Cantonese Ts'ao clan, which was reputedly established in 1819,<sup>80</sup> in the same year as the founding of the Settlement itself. Other early Chinese associations established by *circa* 1860 included the Cantonese Nin Yang Association in 1822,<sup>81</sup> the Hakka Ying Ho Association in 1823,<sup>82</sup> the Hokkien Thean Hock Keong (the predecessor of the Hokkien Huay Kuan) in 1839,<sup>83</sup> the Ngee Ann Kongsi established by the Teochews around 1845,<sup>84</sup> the Chew Wah Lim Club (a Teochew club) founded in 1849,<sup>85</sup> the Sze Yap Chan Si Wuikun in 1848, the Wong (or Huang) clan organisation in 1854, the Lim (or Lin) clan organisation 1857,<sup>86</sup> and the Char Yong Association in 1857.<sup>87</sup>

These early Chinese associations, founded within the first forty years of the history of the Settlement, were followed by the establishment of the Liu Kuan Chang

---

<sup>80</sup> Regarding the founding of the Ts'ao Chia Kuan in 1819, see: Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, pp. 40 and 74. See also the mention of the founding of the Cantonese *Chaojia Guan* in 1819, in: Mak Lau Fong, "Convergence and Divergence," in: Yong Mun Cheong, editor, *Asian Traditions*, p. 43, Table 1.

<sup>81</sup> Regarding the Nin Yang Association, see: Edwin Lee, "Community, Family, and Household" in: Ernest Chew and Edwin Lee, editors, *A History of Singapore*, pp. 247-248. See also the mention of the founding of the *Ningyang Guan* in 1822, in: Mak Lau Fong, "Convergence and Divergence," in: Yong Mun Cheong, editor, *Asian Traditions*, p. 43, Table 1. See also the information on the founding of the *Ning Yang Association* by Ts'ao Ah-chih in 1822, in: Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, p. 40; Ts'ao Ah-chih was also known as Ts'ao Ah-chu and Chow Ah Chi (p. 74).

<sup>82</sup> Regarding the Ying Ho Association, see: Edwin Lee, "Community, Family, and Household" in: Ernest Chew and Edwin Lee, editors, *A History of Singapore*, pp. 247-248. See also the mention of the founding of the *Yinghe Guan* in 1823, in: Mak Lau Fong, "Convergence and Divergence," in: Yong Mun Cheong, editor, *Asian Traditions*, p. 43, Table 1.

<sup>83</sup> Regarding the Thean Hock Keong; see: C.F. Yong, *Tan Kah-kee: The Making of an Overseas Chinese Legend*, p. 134, and Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 93. According to some sources, the Hokkien Huay Kuan was founded *circa* 1860; see: Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, p. 42; Edwin Lee, "Community, Family, and Household" in: Ernest C. T. Chew and Edwin Lee, editors, *A History of Singapore*, p. 248; and: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power*, p. 76, endnote 3. However, in another book, C.F. Yong explains that the Hokkien Huay Kuan was known as the Thean Hock Keong from 1839 to 1916, and as the Thean Hock Keong Hokkien Huay Kuan from 1916 and 1929; see: C.F. Yong, *Tan Kah-kee: The Making of an Overseas Chinese Legend*, p. 134.

<sup>84</sup> See the "Ngee Ann Kongsi (Incorporation) Ordinance," in: *The Laws of the Straits Settlements Edition of 1936*, Volume V, Chapter 258, p. 724.

<sup>85</sup> Regarding the Chew Wah Lim Club, see: C.F. Yong, *Tan Kah-kee: The Making of an Overseas Chinese Legend*, p. 173, endnote 81.

<sup>86</sup> Regarding the Sze Yap Chan Si Wuikun and the Wong (or Huang) and the Lim (or Lin) clan organisations, see: Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, p. 75; and: Edwin Lee, "Community, Family, and Household," p. 248.

<sup>87</sup> C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power*, p. 76, endnote 3.

Chao in 1866,<sup>88</sup> the Teochew Gambier and Pepper Society (or Kongkek) in 1867,<sup>89</sup> the Eng Choon Hway Kuan in 1867, the Kiung Chow Hwee Kuan in 1876, the Siu Heng Wui Kun in 1878, the Straits Chinese Recreation Club in 1885,<sup>90</sup> the Chinese Football Club in 1890,<sup>91</sup> the Straits Chinese National Football Association in 1891,<sup>92</sup> the Weekly Entertainment Club in 1891,<sup>93</sup> the Fui Chew Association in 1889,<sup>94</sup> the Ee Hoe Hean Club in 1895,<sup>95</sup> the Straits Chinese British Association in 1900, the Chinese Swimming Club in 1905,<sup>96</sup> the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce in 1906,<sup>97</sup> the Kwong Wai Sui Society in 1906,<sup>98</sup> the Hakka Fong Yun Thai Association in 1909,<sup>99</sup> the Straits Chinese Football Association in 1911,<sup>100</sup> the Garden Club in 1916,<sup>101</sup> the Singapore

---

<sup>88</sup> Edwin Lee, "Community, Family, and Household," p. 248.

<sup>89</sup> Edwin Lee, "Community, Family, and Household," p. 246; and Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 37-38. Regarding the functions of the Kongkek, see: Carl A. Trocki, *Opium and Empire: Chinese Society in Colonial Singapore, 1800-1910*, pp. 140-141, 147-148, and 152.

<sup>90</sup> See the report on the founding of the Straits Chinese Recreation Club at Hong Lim Green, in the *Straits Times*, 14 January 1885, p. 2, R0016433.

<sup>91</sup> Regarding the Chinese Football Club, see: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 230.

<sup>92</sup> Regarding the Straits Chinese National Football Association, see: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 288.

<sup>93</sup> Regarding the Weekly Entertainment Club, see: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 293.

<sup>94</sup> Regarding the Eng Choon Hway Kuan, the Kiung Chow Hwee Kuan, the Siu Heng Wui Kun, and the Fui Chew Association, see: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power*, p. 76, endnote 3.

<sup>95</sup> Regarding the Ee Ho Hean Club, see: C.F. Yong, *Tan Kah-kee: The Making of an Overseas Chinese Legend*, p. 160. The colonial government exempted the Ee Ho Hean Club from registration under the Societies Ordinance of 1889 in an Order dated 10 October 1895 and published in: *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, Vol. XXIX, No. 48, 18 October 1895, p. 1277, Notification No. 595.

<sup>96</sup> On the founding of the Chinese Swimming Club (originally called the Tanjong Katong Swimming Party) in 1905, see: Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 380; see also the Foreword by Dr. Wee Kim Wee, in: Richard Yap, Editor-in-Chief, *Singapore Chinese Swimming Club: 88 Years and Beyond*, p. 10.

<sup>97</sup> Regarding the founding of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce in 1906, see: Lawrence G. Mani, editor, *Fifty Eight Years of Enterprise: Souvenir volume of the new building of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce - 1964*, p. 71-73; C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, p. 61; and: Sikko Visscher, "Business, Ethnicity and State: The Representational Relationship of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the State, 1945-1997." Ph.D. Thesis, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2002, pp. 40-42.

<sup>98</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 433.

<sup>99</sup> Regarding the Fong Yun Thai Association, see: Hong Liu and Sin-Kiong Wong, *Singapore Chinese Society in Transition*, pp. 20 and 32.

<sup>100</sup> Regarding the Straits Chinese Football Association, see: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 466.

Chinese Rubber Dealers' Association in 1919,<sup>102</sup> the Teochew Poit Ip Hway Kuan in 1929, and the Hakka Nanyang Khek Community Guild in 1929.<sup>103</sup> This list, which makes no pretence of being complete, and likely includes only a very small fraction or sample of the Chinese associations,<sup>104</sup> nevertheless provides some idea of the range of organisations in which Chinese elites could demonstrate their leadership abilities. While some of these organisations were formed by speakers of specific Chinese dialects, others were not identified with particular dialects, such as the Straits Chinese British Association (whose members spoke English and Baba Malay<sup>105</sup>) and the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce (which included speakers of each of the main Chinese dialects spoken in Singapore, as well as some English-speaking Straits Chinese). Chinese organisations provided leading Chinese businessmen with opportunities to build networks and enhance their prestige.<sup>106</sup> By holding leadership positions and titles in these

---

<sup>101</sup> On the opening of the Garden Club in 1916, see: *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, Vol. LI, No. 75, 14 July 1916, p. 1154, Notification No. 846, and: Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 534-535. The leadership of the Garden Club in the 1930s included prominent Chinese men, such as Lee Kong Chian, Lim Bock Kee, the Hon. Dr. Lim Han Hoe, Tan Chin Tuan, C.C. Tan, the Hon. Tay Lian Teck, and Yap Pheng Geck. By January 1932, the Garden Club had moved from Raffles Chambers to the China Building, in Chulia Street. See the Minute Book of the Garden Club in the National Archives of Singapore, microfilm reel NA 110.

<sup>102</sup> C.F. Yong, *Tan Kah-kee: The Making of an Overseas Chinese Legend*, pp. 157-158.

<sup>103</sup> Regarding the Teochew Poit Ip Hway Kuan, and the Nanyang Khek Community Guild, see: Hong Liu and Sin-Kiong Wong, *Singapore Chinese Society in Transition*, pp. 19, 20, and 32-33.

<sup>104</sup> Regarding the vast array of Chinese organisations: according to C.F. Yong, seventy-seven Chinese organisations in Singapore supported Tan Kah Kee's attempt to establish a Chinese Association in 1929; see: C.F. Yong, *Tan Kah-kee: The Making of an Overseas Chinese Legend*, p. 150. According to Maurice Freedman, over half of the approximately 1,500 associations in Singapore circa 1950 were Chinese; see: Maurice Freedman, *Chinese Family and Marriage in Singapore*, p. 93. Mak Lau Fong's study of the traditional Chinese voluntary associations of Singapore analysed 260 such associations which were in existence in the 1970s; see: Mak Lau Fong, "Convergence and Divergence," in: Yong Mun Cheong, editor, *Asian Traditions*, p. 41. Jiann Hsieh, who carried out fieldwork in Singapore in 1976, found that there were 985 associations among the Chinese section of the population here; see: Jiann Hsieh, "Internal Structure and Socio-Cultural Change: A Chinese Case in the Multi-Ethnic Society of Singapore." PhD Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1977, p. 17.

<sup>105</sup> Tan Jiak Kim (the first President of the SCBA) spoke in the Malay language at the inaugural meeting of the SCBA in 1900, and so did Dr. Lim Boon Keng, according to: Lee Yong Hock, "A History of the Straits Chinese British Association (1900-1959)," Academic Exercise, University of Malaya, Singapore, 1960, p. 13. Lee Yong Hock cited: *Singapore Free Press*, 18 August 1900.

<sup>106</sup> On Chinese organisations and prestige, see: Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, pp. 74 and 147.

organisations, Chinese elites could formally assert their elite status not only to their fellow Chinese, but also to their social elite peers among the European and other non-Chinese sections of the population. Such conspicuous assertion of elite status likely facilitated elite-level social interaction and integration by helping elites of different ethnicities to recognise their social equals and counterparts.

Meanwhile, by the mid-nineteenth century, there were already other institutionalised venues for contacts between Chinese elites and their European counterparts. One was the tradition whereby committees of prominent Asians and Europeans were formed from time to time for various purposes, such as to commemorate the visit of Lord Dalhousie with an obelisk in 1850, and to send exhibits to the Great Exhibition of 1851 at the Crystal Palace in London.<sup>107</sup> In the mid-1850s, Chinese and other Asian businessmen joined their European counterparts in petitioning the British Government against the introduction of the rupee in the Straits Settlements; their petition was presented in the House of Lords in 1856 by the Earl of Albemarle, whose brother, Admiral Keppel, was a friend of Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa.<sup>108</sup> Over the years, Asian and European elites followed a tradition of combining together into committees for certain purposes. For example, they formed multiracial reception committees on the occasions of the visits of Prince Alfred, the Duke of Edinburgh, in 1869,<sup>109</sup> and of Prince Albert Victor and Prince George (later King George V) in 1882.<sup>110</sup>

Charitable activities and service to the society featured prominently in the public lives of Asian and European elites, who demonstrated a keen interest in assisting those

---

<sup>107</sup> *Singapore Free Press*, 31 May 1850, p. 1, R0006016; Buckley, pp. 530-535; Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 46.

<sup>108</sup> On the anti-rupee petition and Lord Albemarle, see: Buckley, pp. 598-599.

<sup>109</sup> *Straits Times*, 3 July 1869, p. 2, R0016422.

<sup>110</sup> *Singapore Daily Times*, 11 January 1882, p. 2, R0010200.

who were less fortunate. Through such activities, Asian and European elites interacted with one another and demonstrated their leadership roles in certain organisations, all for a good cause. Elites engaged in some charities which were specific to their own racial or ethnic groups, and also participated in some philanthropic activities which transcended racial divisions and united members of different races in the shared purpose of doing good for others who were in need.

Charitable campaigns connected with famines could provide opportunities for Asian and European elites to form committees and work together to help others – for example, on the occasion of the famine in Ireland in 1880,<sup>111</sup> and the famine in northern China in 1889.<sup>112</sup> Leading Asians and Europeans cooperated in committees to organise Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887,<sup>113</sup> as well as the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 1897.<sup>114</sup> Asians and Europeans formed committees to organise the local celebrations of spectacular imperial events, such as the military victory at Pretoria in 1900<sup>115</sup> and the coronation of King George V in 1911;<sup>116</sup> as well as events that were specific to Singapore, such as the centenary of the Settlement of Singapore in 1919<sup>117</sup> and the New Year's Day sports in 1897.<sup>118</sup>

There were also occasional multiracial social gatherings for Asian and European guests. Notable examples include the fireworks exhibition hosted by the Temenggong in 1848,<sup>119</sup> Tan Kim Seng's celebration of the opening of his new godowns in 1852,<sup>120</sup> the

---

<sup>111</sup> *Straits Times*, 3 April 1880, p. 2, R0016427.

<sup>112</sup> *Straits Times*, 27 February 1889, p. 3, R0016441.

<sup>113</sup> *Straits Times* (weekly issue), 29 June 1887, p. 7, R0011435.

<sup>114</sup> *Straits Times*, 12 June 1897, p. 2, R0016457.

<sup>115</sup> *Straits Times*, 8 June 1900, p. 3, R0016463.

<sup>116</sup> *Straits Times*, 22 June 1911, p. 12, R0016518.

<sup>117</sup> *Straits Times*, 7 February 1919, p. 10, R0016569.

<sup>118</sup> *Singapore Free Press*, 2 January 1897, p. 2, R0006048.

<sup>119</sup> C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, pp. 494-495.

reception at the home of Tan Seng Poh in honour of the Maharajah of Johore in 1876,<sup>121</sup> the opening of the clubhouse of the Straits Chinese Recreation Club in 1887,<sup>122</sup> the opening of Seah Liang Seah's mansion in 1895,<sup>123</sup> and Choa Kim Keat's garden parties, at his country residence in Balestier Road in 1895 and at his home in Pasir Panjang in 1905.<sup>124</sup> In 1933, some two hundred guests attended Cheang Jim Chuan's birthday party at his home in Pasir Panjang; the gathering reportedly included many European guests.<sup>125</sup> In 1937, Tan Chong Chew, contractor to the Harbour Board, hosted a dinner at his home in honour of Harbour Board Chairman Sir George Trimmer; the guests included Arabs, Chinese, and Europeans.<sup>126</sup> Besides such privately-organised gatherings, there were also the social functions hosted by the governors. The opening of Government House in 1869 at the time of the visit of Prince Alfred, the Duke of Edinburgh, provided an elegant venue for elite-level multiracial social gatherings – for example, in honour of Queen Victoria's birthdays<sup>127</sup> and jubilees.<sup>128</sup> In the early decades of the twentieth century, Asians and Europeans attended annual royal birthday celebrations as well as monthly receptions or *At Homes* at Government House.<sup>129</sup>

The appointment of Asian elites to local offices provided another institutional venue for interracial elite networking by the middle of the nineteenth century, and

---

<sup>120</sup> *Singapore Free Press*, 13 February 1852, pp. 2-3, R0006018; also mentioned by Buckley, pp. 554-555, and by Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 46-49.

<sup>121</sup> *Straits Times*, 26 August 1876, p. 1, R0016425.

<sup>122</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 226.

<sup>123</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 284-285.

<sup>124</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 289-290.

<sup>125</sup> *Straits Times*, 3 June 1933, p. 12, R0016698.

<sup>126</sup> *Malaya Tribune*, 30 June 1937, p. 9, R0005945.

<sup>127</sup> See the reports of celebrations of Queen Victoria's birthday by Asian and European elites at Government House: *Straits Times*, 19 August 1876, p. 1, R0016425; and: *Straits Times*, 5 June 1880, p. 1, R0016427.

<sup>128</sup> See the lists of guests at Government House in celebration of Queen Victoria's Jubilee Golden and Diamond Jubilees in: *Straits Times* ("Weekly Issue"), 6 July 1887, p. 11, R0011435; and: *Straits Times*, 25 June 1897, p. 3, R0016457.

<sup>129</sup> See: George Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, p. 36, and: J.S.M. Rennie, *Musings*, p. 61.



continued for the remainder of the colonial era. By 1860, leading Chinese had already been appointed as Grand Jurors<sup>130</sup> and Justices of the Peace,<sup>131</sup> and Tan Kim Seng was a Municipal Commissioner in 1856 and 1857.<sup>132</sup> The prestigious title of *Justice of the Peace* (which was conferred by the Governors<sup>133</sup>), as well as the title of *Municipal Commissioner*, continued to be held by succeeding generations of leading Chinese elites throughout the colonial era,<sup>134</sup> together with the title of *Legislative Councillor*, beginning with the appointment of Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa as the first Chinese member of the Legislative Council in 1869;<sup>135</sup> this latter title carried the additional distinction of entitling those who held it to be addressed as *The Honourable*. The list of *Honourables* who served on the Legislative Council over the years included some of the most distinguished Chinese gentlemen in Malaya, such as: Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa, Seah Liang Seah, Tan Jiak Kim, Dr. Lim Boon Keng, Lee Choon Guan, Song Ong Siang (later

---

<sup>130</sup> Regarding the Grand Jury, see: *Singapore Free Press*, 8 January 1857, p. 4, R0006022; and: *Singapore Free Press*, 5 April 1860, p. 3, R0006023. See also: Y.K. Lee, "The Grand Jury in Early Singapore (1819-1873)," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume XLVI, Pt. 2 (1973), pp. 55-150. See also the Asian names – Chinese, Parsi, and Armenian – in the list of Grand Jurors published in *The Straits Calendar and Directory For The Year 1863*, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0011768.

<sup>131</sup> For example, Tan Tock Seng was listed as a Justice of the Peace in the 1849 edition of *The Singapore Almanack, and Directory*, p. 18; Tan Kim Seng was listed as a JP in the 1858 edition of *The Singapore Almanack & Directory*, p. 31. Both of these directories are on NUS microfilm reel R0011768.

<sup>132</sup> Tan Kim Seng was listed as a Municipal Commissioner in a report on a meeting of the Municipal Commissioners held on 29<sup>th</sup> December 1856, published in the *Singapore Free Press*, 1 January 1857, p. 3, R0006022. Regarding Tan Kim Seng and the Municipal Commission, see also: *Singapore Free Press*, 15 January 1857, supplement p. 1, R0006022; *Singapore Free Press*, 1 October 1857, p. 4, R0006022; *Singapore Free Press*, 22 October 1857, p. 4, R0006022.

<sup>133</sup> On the appointment of JPs by the Governors, see, for example, the report of the appointments of Cheang Hong Lim and Tan Keong Saik as JPs: *Straits Times* ("Weekly Issue"), 6 July 1887, p. 1, R0011435. See the list of JPs in: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership*, p. 16.

<sup>134</sup> For example, there were thirty-six Asian Justices of the Peace in Singapore in 1919, most of whom were Chinese – see: *The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1919*, NUS microfilm reel R0011847, pp. 37-38.

<sup>135</sup> See: *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, No. 52, 24 December 1869, p. 774, Government Notification No. 249, dated 21 December 1869, announcing the appointment of Whampoa as a Member of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements by Her Majesty the Queen.

Sir Ong Siang Song), Wee Swee Teow, Chan Sze Jin, Tan Cheng Lock (later Sir Cheng Lock Tan),<sup>136</sup> Dr. Lim Han Hoe (later Sir Han Hoe Lim), and Tay Lian Teck.<sup>137</sup>

Asian and European elites participated together in prestigious institutions during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The number of these institutions gradually increased, providing these elites with opportunities for networking and for displaying their status as members of the multiracial elite class. In the nineteenth century, Asian and European elites served together on the Board of Trustees of Raffles Institution,<sup>138</sup> the committee of the Singapore Branch of the Straits Settlements Association,<sup>139</sup> and the Management Committee of Tan Tock Seng Hospital,<sup>140</sup> as well as the Municipal Commission and the Legislative Council. In the early decades of the twentieth century, Asian and European elites participated in a variety of institutions with the potential to foster social connections and networking among them, including the Singapore Harbour Board,<sup>141</sup> the Council of the King Edward VII Medical School,<sup>142</sup> the Rural Board,<sup>143</sup> the Rent Assessment Board,<sup>144</sup> the Board of Licensing Justices<sup>145</sup> (elected by the Justices of

---

<sup>136</sup> K.G. Tregonning, "Tan Cheng Lock: A Malayan Nationalist," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Volume X, Number 1 (March 1979), pp. 25-76.

<sup>137</sup> See: "Chinese Members of Council," *Malaya Tribune*, July 27, 1929, p. 2, R0005874; *Who's Who in Malaya 1939*, pp. 41, 93, and 129; and: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, pp. 306-307, endnote 13.

<sup>138</sup> Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa was a Trustee of Raffles Institution. *Straits Times*, 18 December 1869, p. 1, R0016422.

<sup>139</sup> Tan Kim Ching and Tchan Chun Fook were elected to the Committee of the Singapore Branch of the Straits Settlements Association in 1888; see: Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 242. Regarding Asian membership in this Association in the 1930s, see: Chua Ai Lin, "Negotiating National Identity: The English-Speaking Domiciled Communities in Singapore, 1930-1941." M.A. thesis, Department of History, National University of Singapore, 2001, p. 112.

<sup>140</sup> "Tan Tock Seng's Hospital Ordinance," in: *The Laws of the Straits Settlements Edition of 1936*, Volume V, Chapter 192, p. 148.

<sup>141</sup> See, for example, *The Singapore and Malayan Directory*, 1931 edition, p. 567.

<sup>142</sup> On the King Edward VII Medical School Council, see: Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 367.

<sup>143</sup> On the membership of the Rural Board, see, for example, *The Singapore and Malayan Directory for 1939*, p. 990.

<sup>144</sup> On the Rent Assessment Board, see: Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 545. See the report of a meeting of the Rent Assessment Board, in the *Malaya Tribune*, 5 February 1919, p. 5, R0005815; the board members

the Peace), the Board of Trustees of the Singapore Improvement Trust,<sup>146</sup> and the Committee of Management of the Silver Jubilee Fund,<sup>147</sup> as well as the Island Club<sup>148</sup> and the Rotary Club.<sup>149</sup>

The membership of businessmen and professionals in committees, boards, and other organisations was made known to the public through publication in the local newspapers, the *Government Gazette*, and the annual directories.<sup>150</sup> Newspaper reports of meetings of the Legislative Council, the Municipal Commission, and other public boards and committees, typically included lists of the names of the Asian and European members of these bodies,<sup>151</sup> while press reports of company shareholders' meetings often included the names of the directors and shareholders of various ethnicities who attended.<sup>152</sup> The membership of Asian and European elites in prestigious organisations

---

included: A.M.S. Angullia, H. Carpmael, E.A. Elias, Gaw Khek Kiam, Koh San Hin, the Hon. C.J. Saunders, and E. Tessensohn (a prominent Singaporean Eurasian).

<sup>145</sup> On the Board of Licensing Justices, see: *Malaya Tribune*, 19 April 1929, p. 5, R0005872; E. S. Manasseh had just resigned from this board. Tan Kheam Hock, J.P. (1862-1922), became a J.P. in 1912, and served on the Board of Licensing Justices – see: Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 258.

<sup>146</sup> See, for example, *The Singapore and Malayan Directory*, 1931 edition, p. 567; 1940 ed., p.1006.

<sup>147</sup> On the charitable activities of the Silver Jubilee Fund, see the *Malaya Tribune*, 13 May 1937, p. 14, and 20 May 1937, p. 10, R0005944; on the membership of this fund's committee, see: *The Singapore and Malayan Directory for 1939*, p. 1013.

<sup>148</sup> On the opening of the Island Club, see: *Malaya Tribune*, 29 August 1932, p. 10, R0005899.

<sup>149</sup> On the Singapore Rotary Club, founded in 1930, see: Rajabali Jumabhoy, quoted in: *Leaders of Singapore* by Melanie Chew, p. 63; Rajabali Jumabhoy, *Multiracial Singapore – On to the Nineties*, pp. 64-65; Leo Cresson, *Rotary Club of Singapore 1930-1980*; and: John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, pp. 191-192.

<sup>150</sup> For example, see *The Singapore and Malayan Directory for 1939*, p. 954, Legislative Council; p. 976, Municipal Commissioners; p. 990, Rural Board and Singapore Harbour Board; p. 992, p. 1013, the Silver Jubilee Fund Committee of Management; Singapore Improvement Trust board; pp. 1202-1203, Justices of the Peace.

<sup>151</sup> For example, see the reports on meetings of the Municipal Commissioners, in the *Straits Times*, 15 January 1876, 15 June 1887, p. 8, R0011435; p. 2, R0016425; 10 January 1889, p. 3, and 24 January 1889, p. 3, R0016441; 8 April 1897, p. 3 R0016457; 25 November 1922, p. 9, R0016598; see the reports on the meetings of the Legislative Council in the *Straits Times*, 12 February 1876, p. 2, R0016425; 8 February 1889, p. 3, R0016441; 23 June 1897, p. 2, R0016457; and in the *Malaya Tribune*, Nov. 12, 1918, p. 4, R0005814.

<sup>152</sup> For example, see the press reports on the meetings of the Tanjong Pagar Dock Company in the *Straits Times*, 20 March 1869, p. 2, R0016422, and 2 September 1876, unnumbered page, R0016425; of the Straits Insurance Company in the *Straits Times*, 23 January 1885, p. 3, R0016433; and the Tanjong Pagar Land Company in the *Straits Times*, 28 March 1889, p. 3, R0016441.

confirmed and enhanced the elite status of each individual, bringing them together in the institutional centre of the colonial social structure,<sup>153</sup> as well as providing them with institutional opportunities to interact and establish connections with their fellow elites of different races and, thus, to foster the social cohesion of the multiracial elite class.

The big picture of Asian and European elite institutional interaction in the colonial era was characterised by continuity, as well as by the gradual evolution and development of increasing variety and complexity in the institutional network. Although the involvement of Chinese business elites in the Singapore Chamber of Commerce lasted only from 1837 to around 1860, they continued to interact year after year with their European counterparts within other institutional settings, such as the Municipal Commission and the Legislative Council (which were presumably even more prestigious institutions than the Chamber of Commerce), as well as in a growing number of other organisations. Meanwhile, prestigious organisations developed and proliferated *within* the Chinese population itself – for example, the clan associations, the dialect associations or *huay kuan*, and other important organisations formed by Chinese elites, including the Chew Wah Lim Club (a Teochew club) founded in 1849,<sup>154</sup> the Straits Chinese Recreation Club in 1885,<sup>155</sup> the Weekly Entertainment Club in 1891,<sup>156</sup> the Ee Hoe Hean

---

<sup>153</sup> Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*.

<sup>154</sup> Regarding the Chew Wah Lim Club, see: C.F. Yong, *Tan Kah-kee: The Making of an Overseas Chinese Legend*, p. 173, endnote 81.

<sup>155</sup> See the report on the founding of the Straits Chinese Recreation Club at Hong Lim Green, in the *Straits Times*, 14 January 1885, p. 2, R0016433.

<sup>156</sup> Regarding the Weekly Entertainment Club, see: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 293; and: Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*, p. 452.

Club in 1895,<sup>157</sup> the Goh Loo Club,<sup>158</sup> the Chinese Swimming Club in 1905,<sup>159</sup> the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce in 1906, and the Garden Club in 1916.<sup>160</sup>

### **A Profusion of Clubs**

The development of a range of prestigious Chinese organisations, as well as multiracial institutions, paralleled the development of organisations among the Indian, Malay, Arab, and European populations here. For example, the list of clubs in Singapore in the 1931 edition of the *Singapore and Malayan Directory* includes the Chinese Swimming Club, the Chinese Volunteer Club, the Darul Ta'alam Club, the Eurasian Association, the Hollandsche Club, the India-Ceylon Club, the Keng Teck Whay, the Ladies' Lawn Tennis Club, the Leong Teck Whay, the Malaya Football Association, the Malayalee Association, the Malay Volunteer Club, the Mohamedan Starlight Cricket Club, the Royal Singapore Yacht Club, the Sindhi Merchants' Association, the Singapore Amateur Football Association, the Singapore Sinhalese Association, the Straits Chinese Football Association, the Swiss Club, and the United Society of Japanese Planters,

---

<sup>157</sup> Regarding the Ee Ho Hean Club, see: C.F. Yong, *Tan Kah-kee: The Making of an Overseas Chinese Legend*, p. 160, and: Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*, p. 472.

<sup>158</sup> Regarding the Goh Loo Club, see: Melanie Chew, *Leaders of Singapore*, pp. 20 and 37; Chan Kwok Bun and Claire Chiang See Ngoh, *Stepping Out: The Making of Chinese Entrepreneurs*, p. 339; and: Yap Pheng Geck, *Scholar, Banker, Gentleman Soldier: The Reminiscences of Dr. Yap Pheng Geck*, p. 67.

<sup>159</sup> On the founding of the Chinese Swimming Club (originally called the Tanjong Katong Swimming Party) in 1905, see: Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 380; see also the Foreword by Dr. Wee Kim Wee, in: Richard Yap, Editor-in-Chief, *Singapore Chinese Swimming Club: 88 Years and Beyond*, p. 10.

<sup>160</sup> On the opening of the Garden Club in 1916, see: *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, Vol. LI, No. 75, 14 July 1916, p. 1154, Notification No. 846, and: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 534-535. The Garden Club was meeting in the Raffles Chambers as early as 1919 – *Singapore Free Press*, 7 January 1919, p. 10, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0006130. It was still in Raffles Chambers in 1931. By January 1932, the Garden Club had moved from Raffles Chambers to the China Building, in Chulia Street. The leadership of the Garden Club in the 1930s included prominent Chinese men, such as Lee Kong Chian, Lim Bock Kee, the Hon. Dr. Lim Han Hoe, Tan Chin Tuan, C.C. Tan, the Hon. Tay Lian Teck, and Yap Pheng Geck. See the Minute Book of the Garden Club in the National Archives of Singapore, microfilm reel NA 110. The Garden Club ceased operations in the early 1970s; see: Lee Su Yin, "British Chinese Policy in Singapore, 1930s to Mid-1950s: With Particular Focus on the Public Service Career of Tan Chin Tuan." MA Thesis, Department of History, National University of Singapore, 1995, p. 22.

among other organisations.<sup>161</sup> This list provides an idea of the variety of clubs in Singapore at that time, in addition to the historic clubs which are still well-known today, such as the Singapore Cricket Club and the Tanglin Club.

Elite clubs were an important element of the cosmopolitan elite social landscape in colonial Singapore, much as they were in the British and American societies at the same time. E. Digby Baltzell compared the country clubs where privileged Americans gathered, to the British country houses where upper-class Britons spent their weekends<sup>162</sup> – a familiar setting for novels and films about upper-class society in Britain before World War Two, such as *Remains of the Day* and *Gosford Park*. While in former times in Europe the aristocrats gathered and socialised in the palaces and manor houses of the royal and noble families, the business and professional elites of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries felt a need for their own prestigious venues for socialising with one another, forming networks and asserting their status. In these settings, the new business and professional elites could collectively play hosts to the members of their own class, socialising with one another, and organising themselves in hierarchies in which they conferred upon themselves the status markers of club membership and the ranks and titles of club leadership – thus replicating or adapting in a modified, bourgeois form, the patterns of socialising and hierarchy of the old aristocratic elite. Clubs were a means for the business and professional elites to create a new, associational elite class of largely achieved status, which provided them with alternative mechanisms for organisation and ranking outside of the traditional royal and aristocratic hierarchies based mainly on

---

<sup>161</sup> *The Singapore and Malayan Directory for 1931*, pp. 578-586.

<sup>162</sup> E. Digby Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen*, p. 356.

ascribed or hereditary status.<sup>163</sup> Thus, the development of elite clubs among the Asian and European elites in colonial Singapore – most of whom were business and professional elites – was a natural development in this Settlement, which was basically a paradise for wealthy businessmen of various races.

Although elite clubs in colonial Singapore tended to be oriented toward the elites of particular racial or ethnic groups, they also helped to transcend racial and cultural divisions within the elite class, because they helped to provide a means for the leading elites of each group to recognise their counterparts in other groups.<sup>164</sup> The names of the leaders of the elite clubs of different groups were identified in the local annual directories, and in who's who books and other publications. The leaders of Asian and European elite clubs also interacted in the organisation of public celebrations of the Empire and the Monarchy, and on the sports fields. These interactions were subsequently reported in the press,<sup>165</sup> which conveyed to the reading public an aspect of the image or representation of the cosmopolitan elite class – that these prestigious Asian and European social and sporting institutions and the elites who led them were roughly equal to one another, in the sense of sharing membership in the cosmopolitan elite class, symbolised by their participation together in public celebrations.

---

<sup>163</sup> See: E. Digby Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen*, pp. 4, 5, 9, 10, 13, 18, 19, 21, 24, 336, 340, 345, 347, and 348.

<sup>164</sup> Regarding the shared elite comprehension of club memberships as symbols of elite status (even when the clubs were racially specific), see: John M. Carroll, *Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong*, p. 13, and: Chan Wai Kwan, *The Making of Hong Kong Society. Three Studies of Class Formation in Early Hong Kong*, pp. 193 and 205. On memberships and social recognition, see also: Frederick A. Bushee, "Social Organizations in a Small City," *The American Journal of Sociology*, Volume 51, Number 3 (November 1945), p. 220. See also the discussion of mutual recognition of elite status among Asian and European elites, in: David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*, p. 126.

<sup>165</sup> See, for example, the list of Asian and European elites who organised celebrations in honour of the victory at Pretoria, in: *Straits Times*, 8 June 1900, p. 3, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016463.

For example, during the celebrations in Singapore in 1900 in honour of the British victory at Pretoria, the clubs which contributed to the festivities included the (Malay) Darul Adab Club in Jalan Besar, the Ewe Boon Kee Club in Wayang Street, the (Malay) Karbub Ashkedan Club, the Masonic Club, the (European) Singapore Club, the (European) Singapore Cricket Club, the (Eurasian) Singapore Recreation Club, and the (Chinese) Weekly Entertainment Club; indeed, the members of the last-named club initiated the planning of the celebrations by inviting leading Europeans to a dinner in their clubhouse at Ann Siang Hill, at which the Honourable Dr. Lim Boon Keng proposed that a procession be organised.<sup>166</sup> This was an example of the formation of horizontal social connections between Asian and European elites, and the interactions of the members of these clubs in celebrations and sporting events were examples of social exchanges of symbolic capital in the form of mutual recognition of shared elite status. These processes encouraged the solidarity, cohesion, and self-consciousness of the cosmopolitan elite class as a multiracial social group.

By becoming the members and leaders of prestigious organisations, including clubs and associations, and participating in distinctive forms of conspicuous leisurely, recreational, and sporting activities, Asian and European elites publicly advertised their elite status<sup>167</sup> and their position in the central organisational system in the high-status region of social space, at the exemplary centre<sup>168</sup> of the colonial society. From the vantage point of their respective organisations, these elites of different races and cultures could recognise one another as the holders of comparable rank and prominence within

---

<sup>166</sup> *Straits Times*, 5 June 1900, p. 3, and 7 June 1900, p. 2, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016463.

<sup>167</sup> Regarding the function of clubs and various social events to display the status of wealthy men, see: Maurice Freedman, "Immigrants and Associations: Chinese in Nineteenth-Century Singapore," in: Maurice Freedman, *The Study of Chinese Society: Essays by Maurice Freedman*, p. 64.

<sup>168</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*, p. 13.



this society; the leading elites of each racial or cultural section could perceive who were their equals or opposite numbers in the other sections in terms of organisational ascendancy. Having advertised their own status and recognised one another's rank, and thus made their class socially real, they could then interact with one another in the same locale within social space, accepting one another as fellow members of the elite class, while cooperating in the creation and exchange of symbolic capital and together partaking of the rewards of social capital. They socially integrated their multiracial elite class and gave it cohesion through this communion of prestige, while representing the social centrality of their class to the general public. These interactions took place in the contexts of gatherings, social functions, sporting events, and imperial public celebrations.

Although Asian and European elites found a variety of settings within which they could interact and develop social connections that bridged ethnic identities, the social, sporting, and recreational clubs and associations in colonial Singapore were usually specific to particular racial or ethnic sections of the population. European clubs were sometimes specific to certain nationalities, while some Chinese clubs were for particular *pang* or dialect-group identities. Nineteenth-century Chinese clubs in Singapore seem to have been traditional Chinese-style social organisations, such as the Ee Hoe Hean Club (established in 1895), where Chinese businessmen could meet and converse over a game of mahjong.<sup>169</sup> Chinese elites established Western-style social and sporting clubs here in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; these clubs were for Chinese members, and paralleled similar clubs for Europeans – for example, the Singapore Chinese Swimming Club was located along the shore near the (European) Singapore Swimming

---

<sup>169</sup> Yen Ching-hwang, "Traditional Ethnic Chinese Business Organizations in Singapore and Malaysia," in: Leo Suryadinata, editor, *Ethnic Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia: A Dialogue between Tradition and Modernity*, pp. 214-216.

Club, and the Chinese and other Asians established football clubs which paralleled the club-sponsored football-playing among the European inhabitants of Singapore.<sup>170</sup> Perhaps the most conspicuous example of this parallelism of clubs for different racial or ethnic communities was the establishment of the Singapore Recreation Club, a Eurasian club, in 1883,<sup>171</sup> at the opposite end of the Padang from the Singapore Cricket Club, a European club.<sup>172</sup> The Straits Chinese Recreation Club at Hong Lim Green, founded in 1885, was reportedly the first Chinese club to promote English sports, such as tennis and cricket.<sup>173</sup>

Clubs simultaneously promoted intra-racial and intra-cultural social cohesion within particular sections of the population, as well as the interracial and trans-cultural social connections which transcended the racial and cultural differences among the Asian and European elites. Generally speaking, elite Asian and European clubs in colonial Singapore brought together people who were culturally similar, while interactions between different clubs – between their leaders and their sports teams – helped to reduce the social distance among these elites and to provide opportunities for social interaction and acquaintanceship which could help to integrate the elites of different races into a cohesive multiracial elite class. Moreover, the shared hierarchical nature of the clubs of the elites of different sections of the population, featuring formal titles of office which were conferred on members and published in the newspapers and the annual directories,

---

<sup>170</sup> Regarding the Chinese football organisations, see: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 216, 230, 288, 466, and 468.

<sup>171</sup> Makepeace et al., *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume Two, pp. 365-367; Patrick Khaw, "The Singapore Recreation Club: 1883-1963," B.A. Honours Thesis, Department of History, National University of Singapore, 1986/87.

<sup>172</sup> Regarding Asian and European sporting clubs, see, for example: Allan E. Moreira, *The Malaya Sports Record* Edition 1922-23; and: N.G. Aplin and Quek Jin Jong, "Celestials in Touch: Sport and the Chinese in Colonial Singapore," in: J.A. Mangan and Fan Hong, editors, *Sport in Asian Society: Past and Present*, pp. 67-98.

<sup>173</sup> *Straits Times*, 14 January 1885, p. 2, R0016433.

elevated individuals of different races and cultures to the rank of *leading* social elites.<sup>174</sup> This elevation promoted the interaction and mutual recognition of elite status among elites of different races, who shared roughly the same social rank in the sense of holding symbolic capital and therefore belonged to the same region of social space<sup>175</sup> – the locale in social space occupied by the leading local social elites. The constellation of elite Asian and European clubs and associations formed an important component of the system of organisations at the centre of the colonial society,<sup>176</sup> along with other prestigious organisations, such as the European, Chinese, Chettiar, and Indian Chambers of Commerce, the Legislative Council, the Municipal Commission, the Advisory Boards, and other public-sector and private-sector boards and committees.

Considering the large influx of Chinese immigrants in the early years of the Settlement of Singapore, it should be no surprise that some of the earliest associations here were founded by the Chinese. These included the Ts'ao Chia Kuan in 1819,<sup>177</sup> the Cantonese Nin Yang Association in 1822, and the Hakka Ying Ho Association in 1823.<sup>178</sup> Thirty-six Chinese businessmen established an organisation called the Keng

---

<sup>174</sup> For example, the names of the leaders of prestigious Chinese clubs were reported in: *Straits Times*, 5 June 1900, p. 3, R0016463, and: *Malaya Tribune*, May 17, 1937, p. 7, R0005944.

<sup>175</sup> On *social space*, see: Pierre Bourdieu, "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups." *Theory and Society*, Vol. 14, No. 6 (November 1985), pp. 723-726; Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Space," in: Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*, pp. 6-7, 10, 11, 12, and 13; Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power," in: *Sociological Theory*, Volume 7, Number 1 (Spring 1989), pp. 17, 20, 21, and 22; Pierre Bourdieu, "What Makes a Social Class? On The Theoretical and Practical Existence Of Groups," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology: A Critical Review*, Volume XXXII, 1987, pp. 3-4, 6, 7, and 13; Peter M. Blau and Joseph E. Schwartz, *Crosscutting Social Circles: Testing a Macrostructural Theory of Intergroup Relations*, p. 14, and Anne Buttimer, "Social Space in Interdisciplinary Perspective," *Geographical Review*, Vol. 59, No. 3 (July 1969), pp. 418.

<sup>176</sup> See: Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*, pp. ix, x, xxxii, xxxiii, xxxvii, xxxviii, 3-16, 38, 39, and 97, regarding the concept of the *central institutional system*.

<sup>177</sup> Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, pp. 40 and 74.

<sup>178</sup> Regarding the Nin Yang Association and the Ying Ho Association, see: Edwin Lee, "Community, Family, and Household" in: Ernest Chew and Edwin Lee, editors, *A History of Singapore*, pp. 247-248.

Tek Whay in 1831; Sir Ong Siang Song noted that this organisation was in operation *circa* 1923, and that it owned eight shophouses in Singapore.<sup>179</sup>

The early European inhabitants of Singapore began to establish organisations of their own soon after the founding of the Settlement. The Europeans formed a variety of clubs here in the nineteenth century, including the Raffles Club in 1825,<sup>180</sup> the Singapore Yacht Club by 1826,<sup>181</sup> the Billiards Club in 1829,<sup>182</sup> the Agricultural and Horticultural Society in 1836,<sup>183</sup> the Turf Club (originally called the Sporting Club) in 1842,<sup>184</sup> the Masonic Lodge Zetland in the East in 1845,<sup>185</sup> the Cricket Club in 1852,<sup>186</sup> the Savage Club (or Amateur Dramatic Society) *circa* 1860,<sup>187</sup> the Singapore Club in 1862,<sup>188</sup> the Tanglin Club in 1865,<sup>189</sup> the Amateur Musical Society in 1865,<sup>190</sup> the Debating Society *circa* 1876,<sup>191</sup> the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society in 1877,<sup>192</sup> the Rowing

---

<sup>179</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 29.

<sup>180</sup> The founding of the Raffles Club on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1825 was reported in *The Singapore Chronicle*, 21 July 1825, quoted in: *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British India and its Dependencies*, Vol. XXI, No. 124, April 1826, pp. 529-530. C.B. Buckley, p. 439, noted that the Raffles Club existed between 1825 and 1835.

<sup>181</sup> See the references to the Singapore Yacht Club in: J.H. Moor, *Notices of the Indian Archipelago and Adjacent Countries*, p. 268, quoting the *Singapore Chronicle* of August 1826; and: *Singapore Chronicle*, 15 February 1827, and 26 April 1827, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0009222.

<sup>182</sup> On the Billiard Club, see: C.B. Buckley, pp. 206-207.

<sup>183</sup> Dr. Gilbert E. Brooke, "Botanic Gardens and Economic Notes," in: Makepeace et al., *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume Two, pp. 69-70.

<sup>184</sup> On the early history of the Singapore Sporting Club, see: Sumiko Tan, *The Winning Connection*, p. 9; W.H. Read, *Play and Politics*, p. 5; Makepeace et al., *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Vol. Two, p. 348; and: *Singapore Free Press*, 2 March 1843, p. 3, Singapore National Library microfilm reel NL1558. The Sporting Club was renamed the Singapore Turf Club in 1924 – see: Sumiko Tan, p. 9.

<sup>185</sup> Lim Kuang Hui (Worshipful Master of Lodge Singapore No. 7178 E.C.), *In the Chair of King Solomon*, p. 13.

<sup>186</sup> On the founding of the Cricket Club, see: Ilsa Sharp, *The Singapore Cricket Club 1852-1985*, p. 21.

<sup>187</sup> C.B. Buckley, p. 725.

<sup>188</sup> Walter Makepeace, "Institutions and Clubs," in: Makepeace et al., Volume Two, p. 312.

<sup>189</sup> Barbara Ann Walsh, *Forty Good Men: The Story of the Tanglin Club In The Island of Singapore 1865-1990*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>190</sup> C.B. Buckley, p. 724.

<sup>191</sup> Walter Makepeace, "Institutions and Clubs," in: Makepeace et al., Volume Two, p. 317.

<sup>192</sup> C.E. W. (C.E. Wurtzburg ?), "Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society," *British Malaya*, June 1948, p. 27.

Club in 1879,<sup>193</sup> the Ladies' Lawn Tennis Club in 1884,<sup>194</sup> the Singapore Amateur Dramatic and Musical Society in 1885,<sup>195</sup> the Polo Club in 1886,<sup>196</sup> the Cycling Club in 1890,<sup>197</sup> the Golf Club in 1891,<sup>198</sup> the Swimming Club in 1893,<sup>199</sup> the Straits Philosophical Society in 1893,<sup>200</sup> the Keppel Golf Club in 1902,<sup>201</sup> the Automobile Club in 1907,<sup>202</sup> and the Flying Club in 1928.<sup>203</sup> By the 1930s, British armed forces personnel stationed in Singapore had established the Changi Garrison Yacht Club, the Naval Base Sailing Club, and the Royal Air Force Yacht Club.<sup>204</sup> Clubs founded for specific non-English European nationalities included the (German) Teutonia Club in 1856,<sup>205</sup> the *Schweizer Schützenverein* or Swiss Rifle Shooting Club in 1871,<sup>206</sup> the (Scottish) St. Andrew's Society in 1908,<sup>207</sup> and the (Dutch) Hollandse Club in 1908.<sup>208</sup>

---

<sup>193</sup> Regarding the founding of the Rowing Club, see the reports of the meeting held in the Exchange Rooms on 25 June 1879, in: *The Straits Times Overland Journal*, 2 July 1879, pp. 1 and 6, R0006771.

<sup>194</sup> Makepeace et al., *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume Two, pp. 337-338.

<sup>195</sup> Makepeace et al., *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume Two, p. 596.

<sup>196</sup> Wendy Hutton, *The Singapore Polo Club: An Informal History 1886-1982*, pp. 9-13.

<sup>197</sup> Walter Makepeace, "Institutions and Clubs," in: Makepeace et al., Volume Two, p. 317.

<sup>198</sup> Lulin Reutens, *The Eagle & the Lion: A History of the Singapore Island Country Club*, p. 17, and Makepeace et al., *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume Two, pp. 338-339.

<sup>199</sup> Walter Makepeace, "Institutions and Clubs," in: Makepeace et al., *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume Two, Chapter XVII, p. 318.

<sup>200</sup> Walter Makepeace, "Institutions and Clubs," in: Makepeace et al., Volume Two, p. 301.

<sup>201</sup> Lulin Reutens, *The Eagle & the Lion*, p. 23.

<sup>202</sup> Makepeace et al., *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume Two, p. 362.

<sup>203</sup> On the founding of the Flying Club in 1928, see: James H. Martin, ed, *H.M. King George V Silver Jubilee May 3<sup>rd</sup> – May 11<sup>th</sup> 1935 Souvenir Programme*, p. 190; and: *British Malaya*, July 1928, p. 68. The Flying Club became the Royal Singapore Flying Club in 1931, by permission of King George V – see a letter dated 15 August 1950, from the Acting Colonial Secretary, Singapore, to the Secretary of the Royal Singapore Flying Club, No. 3821/50, in the National Archives of Singapore, Accession Number 26337.

<sup>204</sup> R.H.C. Laverton, "Malaya Becomes Sport-Minded," 1936 *Straits Times Annual*, p. 104.

<sup>205</sup> Regarding the Teutonia Club, see: Emil Helfferich, *A Company History: Behn, Meyer & Co.*, Volume I, p. 106, and Volume II, pp. 48-52 and 122..

<sup>206</sup> Hans Schweizer-Iten, *One Hundred Years of the Swiss Club and the Swiss Community of Singapore 1871-1971*, p. 8. Regarding the elegant suburban clubhouse of the Swiss Club, see: Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*, p. 84.

<sup>207</sup> Walter Makepeace, "Institutions and Clubs," in: Makepeace et al., Volume Two, p. 303.

<sup>208</sup> On 5 March 1908, the Hollandsche Club of Singapore was exempted from registration under the Societies Ordinance of 1889 by order of the Governor in Council; see: *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, Volume XLIII, No. 12, 13 March 1908, p. 445, Notification No. 278. The year of the founding of the Hollandse Club in Singapore is given as 1908 at this website: <http://www.petanque.org/clubinfo/country/Singapore> accessed in August 2006.

Chinese elites also established social and sporting clubs which featured Western-style sporting and recreational activities. By the 1860s, Chinese elites had founded clubs where they could play billiards and bowls; when Prince Alfred, the Duke of Edinburgh, visited Singapore in 1869, he went bowling at one of these Chinese clubs.<sup>209</sup> In 1885, a group of elite Chinese gentlemen of Singapore founded the Straits Chinese Recreation Club, or SCRC, to play tennis and cricket.<sup>210</sup> The SCRC celebrated the opening of its clubhouse at Hong Lim Green in 1887 with a gathering of Chinese and European guests. For years, members of the SCRC visited this location at Hong Lim Green to play football and tennis, billiards and chess; the success of this club is indicated by the fact that, in 1914, they demolished their clubhouse to replace it with a new structure.<sup>211</sup> Another prestigious Chinese sporting club, the Chinese Swimming Club, was opened in 1905, along the shore near the (European) Singapore Swimming Club;<sup>212</sup> this elite Chinese social and recreational club has now flourished for over a century.

Meanwhile, other social and sporting clubs appeared in Singapore. The Chinese and the Europeans were not the only people who established sporting clubs here. The Eurasians started the Singapore Recreation Club in 1883,<sup>213</sup> and this club is still in operation at the Padang. The Mohamedan Starlight Cricket Club was founded in 1892.<sup>214</sup> The Darul Adab Club, a Malay football club, was established in 1894, and was active

---

<sup>209</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 155. Sir Ong Siang Song cited: J.D. Vaughan, *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese of the Straits Settlements*, p. 5.

<sup>210</sup> *Straits Times*, 14 January 1885, p. 2, NUS microfilm reel R0016433; Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 216.

<sup>211</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 216, and 226-227. Sir Ong Siang Song was a President of the SCRC, where he played tennis – see: Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 247.

<sup>212</sup> On the founding of the Chinese Swimming Club (originally called the Tanjong Katong Swimming Party) in 1905, see: Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 380; see also the Foreword by Dr. Wee Kim Wee, in: Richard Yap, Editor-in-Chief, *Singapore Chinese Swimming Club: 88 Years and Beyond*, p. 10.

<sup>213</sup> Makepeace et al., *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume Two, pp. 365-367; Patrick Khaw, "The Singapore Recreation Club: 1883-1963," B.A. Honours Thesis, Department of History, National University of Singapore, 1986/87.

<sup>214</sup> *The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1919*, p. 103, NUS microfilm reel R0011847, shows that the Mohamedan Starlight Cricket Club was founded in 1892.

well into the twentieth century.<sup>215</sup> The members of the Singapore Indian Association, which was established in 1923, played cricket and tennis at Balestier Road.<sup>216</sup>

Volunteer soldiering provided opportunities for association within the memberships of different sections of the population. European businessmen established the Singapore Volunteer Rifles in 1854, following the Crimean War and rioting among Chinese in Singapore.<sup>217</sup> The Singapore Volunteer Rifles included Eurasians and Germans as well as British volunteers.<sup>218</sup> The Volunteer Rifles were disbanded in December 1887, and replaced by the Singapore Volunteer Artillery in February 1888.<sup>219</sup> During the South African War between the British and the Boers, Britons in Singapore formed a new Volunteer Rifle Corps in 1900 (which was disbanded in 1904),<sup>220</sup> while local Eurasians and Chinese formed the new Singapore Volunteer Infantry Companies No. 1 and No. 2 respectively in 1901.<sup>221</sup> The Malay Company of the Singapore Volunteer Corps was established in 1910, with volunteer soldiers recruited from local Malay football clubs.<sup>222</sup> Like the Chinese Volunteer Company, the Malay Company was also connected with the formation of clubs: the Malay Volunteer Club in Bras Basah

---

<sup>215</sup> *The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1912*, p. 93, NUS microfilm reel R0011843, shows that the Darul Adab Club was established in 1894. Regarding the activities of the Darul Adab Football Club, see: *Straits Times*, 14 August 1899, p. 2, R0016462; *Straits Times*, 11 September 1899, p. 3, R0016462; *Straits Times*, 7 June 1900, p. 2, R0016463; *Straits Times*, 13 June 1900, p. 2, R0016463; *Straits Times*, 18 June 1900, p. 3, R0016463; *Singapore Free Press*, 6 February 1919, p. 10, R0006130.

<sup>216</sup> R.B. Krishnan, *Indians in Malaya: A Pageant of Greater India*, p. 27; Leslie Netto, *Passage of Indians*, pp. 31-32; and: Rajabali Jumabhoy, *Multiracial Singapore – On to the Nineties*, pp. 55-56 and 89.

<sup>217</sup> C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, pp. 606-607.

<sup>218</sup> Henry Barnaby Leicester, "Personal Recollections" In: Makepeace et al., eds., *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume Two, p. 530.

<sup>219</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel G.A. Derrick, "Singapore Volunteers," in: Walter Makepeace et al., eds., *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume One, p. 386; and: Captain T.M. Winsley, *A History of the Singapore Volunteer Corps 1854-1937*, p. 1.

<sup>220</sup> G.A. Derrick, p. 387.

<sup>221</sup> G.A. Derrick, p. 388; Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 327-328.

<sup>222</sup> Wan Meng Hao, "Malay Soldiering in Singapore, 1910-1942," in: Khoo Kay Kim, Elinah Abdullah, and Wan Meng Hao, editors, *Malays / Muslims in Singapore*, pp. 184 and 189-191.

Road was founded in 1910.<sup>223</sup> The Eurasian Company was disbanded in 1909,<sup>224</sup> but a new Eurasian Company was formed in 1918.<sup>225</sup>

Service as a volunteer soldier likely facilitated social interaction and integration with fellow volunteers when they assembled for their drills, and provided yet another type of institutional membership and activity which was shared by at least some Asian and European elites; though they belonged to separate companies along racial lines, they still marched together in the same parades at least once every year. Governor Sir John Anderson opened a new clubhouse for the Chinese Volunteer Club in Beach Road in 1907; this clubhouse featured a billiard room and a bar,<sup>226</sup> which indicates that volunteer soldiering was about recreational and social activities as well as military service, and that volunteering belonged to the social realm of clubs and associations at least as much as they belonged to the military element of this Settlement.<sup>227</sup> In the same year, the Chinese Volunteers staged their first military wedding ceremony for Lieutenant Song Ong Siang to Helen Yeo Hee Neo at the Presbyterian Church.<sup>228</sup> Volunteer service may have fostered social connections among elites from different sectors; a British volunteer, Lionel Griffith-Jones, found that relatively senior British bankers, businessmen, and officials served as low-ranking enlisted men, together with their more junior compatriots, while some young Britons who had previous military experience achieved higher rank as

---

<sup>223</sup> *The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1919*, p. 103, NUS microfilm reel R0011847.

<sup>224</sup> G.A. Derrick, p. 388; Wan Meng Hao, "Malay Soldiering," p. 186.

<sup>225</sup> A.H. Carlos, "Eurasian Volunteers," in: Walter Makepeace, Gilbert E. Brooke, and Roland St. J. Braddell, editors, *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume One, pp. 394.

<sup>226</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 415-417.

<sup>227</sup> It seems quite possible that the Singapore Volunteers viewed their volunteer organisations as being somewhat similar to clubs. In his book about British communities in treaty ports in China (where there were British volunteer corps in Shanghai, Tianjin, and Hankou), Robert Bickers quoted a Shanghai English-language newspaper, the *North China Herald*, which compared the volunteer corps to a club in 1928 – see: Robert Bickers, *Britain in China: Community, Culture and Colonialism 1900-1949*, p. 82. See also Bickers' comparison of the application system of the Shanghai Light Horse, an elite volunteer unit, with those of social clubs, on p. 97.

<sup>228</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 246-247.



non-commissioned officers.<sup>229</sup> Yap Pheng Geck, a prominent local banker in the 1930s who served with the Volunteers in the Chinese Company in Singapore for twenty years, recalled that the Chinese Volunteer officers were recruited from the higher echelons of Singapore society, and that he took great pride in his own promotion to the rank of Captain in command of the Chinese Company of the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force.<sup>230</sup> Captain Yap recalled taking part in the annual King's Birthday Parades on the Padang, as did a British volunteer, Oswald Gilmour, who noted the pride he felt while marching in these parades.<sup>231</sup> Volunteer service provided some Asian and European elites with certain types of shared experiences and memories, which were, in turn, closely connected with – and symbolic of – their shared loyalty to their Empire and its Crown.

The rich variety of clubs and associations which flourished in Singapore by the early twentieth century is indicated by the listings in the annual local directories. Many of these organisations were clearly connected with particular sections of the population, and the variety of institutions reflected the ethnic and racial diversity within the colonial society, as well as the fact that each racial or ethnic section had their own clubs and associations. There were clubs for various ethnic categories, both Asian and European. For example, *The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1912*<sup>232</sup> lists a wide range of clubs, associations, and societies, including: the (Chinese) Bukit Bahru Football Club, also known as the Sin San Kok, founded in 1904; the Chinese Swimming Club, opened in 1905; the (Malay) Darul Adab Club, founded in 1894; the Darul Khair Club, founded in 1899; the Deutscher Lese Verein or German Reading Club; the Hollandsche Club (or

---

<sup>229</sup> Lionel Griffith-Jones, *That's My Lot: An Anecdotal Autobiography of a British Ex-Singapore Colonial*, p. 48.

<sup>230</sup> Yap Pheng Geck, *Scholar, Banker, Gentleman Soldier*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>231</sup> O.W. Gilmour, *With Freedom to Singapore*, p. 189.

<sup>232</sup> *The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1912*, pp. 93-107, NUS microfilm reel R0011843.

Dutch Club); the (Chinese) Juvenile Football Club; the (European) Keppel Golf Club; the (European) Ladies' Lawn Tennis Club, established in 1884; the Malay Volunteer Club, founded in 1910; the Masonic Club; the National Union Club, a football and cricket club with Chinese and Indian members that was founded in 1906; the Rafik Muslim Football Club; the (European) Sepoy Lines Golf Club; the Singapore Automobile Club; the (European) Singapore Club; the Singapore Catholic Club; the Singapore Chess Club,<sup>233</sup> the (European) Singapore Cricket Club; the (British Army) Singapore Garrison Golf Club; the (European) Singapore Golf Club; the (Eurasian) Singapore Recreation Club, the (European) Singapore Rowing Club; the Singapore Sporting Club; the Straits Athletic Club, a club with Indian and Chinese members that was founded in 1909; the Straits Chinese Football Association, established in 1911; the Straits Chinese Recreation Club; the (European) Singapore Swimming Club; the Swiss Rifle Shooting Club, the (European) Tanglin Club; the (German) Teutonia Club; the Twilight Club or Thian Yang Kok, a Chinese football club founded in 1908; the Warder's Club at the prison; the White Star Club or Wha Yong Kok, a Chinese club founded in 1910; Masonic Associations including the District Grand Lodge of the Eastern Archipelago, established in 1858; the District Grand Chapter of the Eastern Archipelago, founded in 1906; the Eastern Gate Lodge, the Lodge St. George, the Lodge St. Michael, the Lodge Zetland in the East, the Dalhousie Royal Arch Chapter, and the Edaljee Khory Lodge of Mark Master Masons;<sup>234</sup> the (Chinese) Amateur Drawing Association, established in 1909;<sup>235</sup> the Asiatic Health

---

<sup>233</sup> Rajabali Jumabhoy, who joined the Chess Club in 1924, recalled that the members of this club met weekly at the Europe Hotel, and later at the Adelphi Hotel – Rajabali Jumabhoy, *Multiracial Singapore – On to the Nineties*, p. 59.

<sup>234</sup> Regarding the Edaljee Khory Lodge of Mark Master Masons, named after a Parsi lawyer and Freemason, see: Dato Sir Roland St. John Braddell, "Law and the Lawyers," in: Makepeace et al., eds., *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume One, p. 213.

<sup>235</sup> Regarding the Amateur Drawing Association, see: Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 475-477.

Culture League, the (Chinese) Asiatic Mutual Association, founded in 1911; the (European) Association of Engineers; the Malaya Branch of the British Medical Association (the office-bearers of which included Dr. Yin, Dr. Avetoom, and a number of Europeans); the Chinese Christian Association Hall, established in 1889; the (Chinese) Gunong Sayang Association, established in 1910; the Indian Christian Association, established in 1903; the Malaya Football Association (of which three sultans were among the members), founded in 1909; the Moslem Association, founded in 1898; the Singapore Pranakan<sup>236</sup> Association, a Malay football club founded in 1898; the Singapore Rifle Association; the Straits Pharmaceutical Association; the Straits Racing Association, an organisation representing the horse racing clubs of Singapore, Penang, Perak, and Selangor; the Straits Settlements Association (with a committee including the Hon. Seah Liang Seah and a number of Europeans); the Young Men's Benevolent Society, with Chinese officers and committee members; the Young Men's Christian Association of Singapore, founded in 1903; the Chinese YMCA; the Young Women's Christian Association; the British and Foreign Bible Society; the Boustead Institute for Seamen; the Children's Aid Society; the Cornwall Minstrels, an amateur musical organisation with Chinese members, established in 1904; the Epworth League; the Moslem Union, founded in 1910; the (Eurasian) Philharmonic Society of St. Cecilia of the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd; the Singapore Sailors' Home, founded in 1851; the Singapore Bar, organised in 1875;<sup>237</sup> the Singapore Diocesan Association; the Singapore Philharmonic Society; the (Malay) Singapore Printers' Association, founded in 1907, the (Scottish) Singapore St. Andrew's Society, founded in 1908; the Society for the Protection of

---

<sup>236</sup> Note the spelling of *Pranakan* here – perhaps an alternative spelling of *Peranakan*?

<sup>237</sup> Dato Sir Roland St. John Braddell, "Law and the Lawyers," in: Makepeace et al., eds., *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume One, pp. 215-216.

Chinese Women and Children; the Society of St. Vincent de Paul; the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society; the Straits Philosophical Society; and the Committee of Management of Tan Tock Seng's Hospital.<sup>238</sup>

The wide variety of associations and clubs catered to the civic, social, sporting, and recreational interests of many sections and sub-sections within the colonial society. The Japanese Association at Wilkie Road opened in 1915,<sup>239</sup> the (Jewish) Myrtle Club opened by 1916,<sup>240</sup> the (Chinese) Garden Club opened in 1916,<sup>241</sup> and the American Association appeared in 1917.<sup>242</sup> Ceylonese cricket players established the Lanka Union in 1920, and this club became the Ceylon Sports Club in 1928.<sup>243</sup> The Singapore Indian Association was founded in 1923; its members played cricket and tennis on grounds along Balestier Road, and they played billiards in their clubhouse, first at Short Street, and later at Owen Road and Race Course Road.<sup>244</sup> Local Sikhs established the Singapore Sikhs Cricket Club in 1927, and this club became the Singapore Khalsa Association in 1931.<sup>245</sup> Immigrants from India also established important associations especially for businessmen in Singapore. The Indian Merchants Association was established in 1924, and this organisation became the Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce in 1935.<sup>246</sup>

---

<sup>238</sup> *The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1912*, pp. 93-107, NUS microfilm reel R0011843.

<sup>239</sup> *Prewar Japanese Community in Singapore – Picture and Record* (1998), pp. 80-81 and 228.

<sup>240</sup> Regarding the Myrtle Club, see: *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, 30 June 1916, p. 1062, Notification No. 794, and 5 January 1923, p. 3, Notification No. 11. See also: Eze Nathan, *The History of Jews in Singapore 1830-1945*, p. 69, and: Denis Santry and Claude, *Salubrious Singapore*, p. 36.

<sup>241</sup> *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, 14 July 1916, p. 1154, Notification No. 846; and: Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 534-535.

<sup>242</sup> Glenn A. Wood, editor, *American Association of Singapore 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*, p. 9. Dato Sir Roland Braddell mentioned that the American population in Singapore was growing significantly around this time; see: Braddell, "The Good Old Days," in: Makepeace et al., eds., *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume Two, p. 505.

<sup>243</sup> <http://www.cscsingapore.org.sg/aboutus/index.htm> – "History of the Ceylon Sports Club 1928-1999."

<sup>244</sup> R.B. Krishnan, *Indians in Malaya: A Pageant of Greater India*, p. 27; Leslie Netto, *Passage of Indians*, pp. 31-32; and: Rajabali Jumabhoy, *Multiracial Singapore – On to the Nineties*, pp. 55-56 and 89.

<sup>245</sup> Tan Tai Yong, *Singapore Khalsa Association*, pp. 23 and 25.

<sup>246</sup> *Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce Sixtieth Anniversary Memento*, p. 1.

The Chettiar Chamber of Commerce was established in 1931.<sup>247</sup> Rajabali Jumabhoy, who was the President of the Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce in 1935, recalled that among the organisations he joined during the 1920s were the Persektuan Setia Club in North Bridge Road (a Malay club which welcomed all Muslims, where the members played football, billiards, and poker), the Muslim Association<sup>248</sup> at Selegie and Wilkie Roads (where the members could play billiards), the Chess Club which met at the Europe Hotel, and the Arab Club; Rajabali Jumabhoy explained that he had many friends among the Arabs, who owned a great deal of real estate in Singapore.<sup>249</sup>

There were many parallels between these various clubs and associations founded by Asians and Europeans, in terms of their social and sporting activities. Many of these clubs and associations had some connection with sporting or recreational activities of some sort, whether outdoor sports such as cricket, football, golf, hockey, lawn bowls, and tennis, or indoor activities, such as billiards, bowling, card games, chess, dancing, and mahjong. These organisations promoted activities which provided Asian and European elites with common points of interest, which could potentially help them to make social connections when their teams played against each other as well as during social functions, when their shared interests in sports and recreation could provide them with conversation topics of mutual interest. In these ways, clubs and associations could help to bring Asian and European elites together in the same region of social space, and

---

<sup>247</sup> Hans-Dieter Evers and Jayarani Pavadarayan, "Religious Fervour and Economic Success: The Chettiars of Singapore," in: K.S. Sandhu and A. Mani, editors, *Indian Communities in Southeast Asia*, p. 856.

<sup>248</sup> According to Shahril Mohd Shah, the Muslim Association of Singapore (or *Persekutuan Islam Singapura*) was established in 1894; see: Shahril Mohd Shah, "From the Mohammedan Advisory Board to the Muslim Advisory Board," in: Khoo Kay Kim, Elinah Abdullah, and Wan Meng Hao, editors, *Malays / Muslims in Singapore: Selected Readings in History, 1819-1965*, p. 161; however, according to E. Kay Gillis, the Muslim Association was established in 1900; see: E. Kay Gillis, *Singapore Civil Society and British Power*, p. 71. See also: Ismail Kassim, *Problems of Elite Cohesion: A Perspective from a Minority Community*, p. 16.

<sup>249</sup> Rajabali Jumabhoy, *Multiracial Singapore – On to the Nineties*, pp. 59 and 65.

facilitate their interracial social integration as a cohesive multicultural elite class. The leading Asian and European elites could recognise one another as being similar in the sense of playing the same sports and holding leadership posts in parallel sports clubs for different sections of the population, even if their cultural backgrounds and identities were generally quite different from one another.<sup>250</sup> The names of the different clubs and their leaders, and the sports they played, were published in the annual local directories, providing a convenient reference for anyone interested in the multiracial elite social structure, and enabling the leading Asian and European elites to recognise their counterparts. In the business realm, the parallel chambers of commerce for Chettiars, Chinese, Europeans, and Indians provided the organisational mechanisms for recognising the leading businessmen of different sections of the population. Clubs and associations helped elites of different races and cultures to develop a sense of proximity in social space and shared elite identity and rank, in terms of meeting during sporting competitions and serving as leaders of their respective organisations (which often paralleled one another), despite the fact that they did not assimilate into a single elite culture.

While the lists of office-bearers of these clubs and associations in the directories make it clear that most of these organisations were led by men, local ladies also established their own clubs. European ladies founded the Ladies' Lawn Tennis Club in 1884, with a clubhouse and extensive grounds at Dhoby Ghaut, between Bras Basah and Stamford Roads;<sup>251</sup> its premises, featuring lawn tennis courts and croquet courts, were

---

<sup>250</sup> Regarding the shared elite comprehension of club memberships as symbols of elite status (even when the clubs were racially specific), see: John M. Carroll, *Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong*, p. 13, and: Chan Wai Kwan, *The Making of Hong Kong Society. Three Studies of Class Formation in Early Hong Kong*, pp. 193 and 205. See also the discussion of mutual recognition of elite status among Asian and European elites, in: David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*, p. 126.

<sup>251</sup> Arnold Wright and H.A. Cartwright, editors, *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya*, p. 584.

known in Malay as the *Padang Kechil*, while the club itself was called the *Club Perempuan*.<sup>252</sup> The Ladies' Lawn Tennis Club was highly prestigious *circa* 1900;<sup>253</sup> this club opened a new clubhouse in May 1905,<sup>254</sup> and hosted tournaments for tennis and croquet as late as *circa* 1912.<sup>255</sup> It was still in operation in the 1920s, and even allowed some men to join as subscribing members;<sup>256</sup> but the club ceased operations by 1932, and its grounds were taken over by the YMCA.<sup>257</sup> Aside from tennis, European ladies were also evidently interested in rifle shooting: the 1919 edition of *The Singapore and Straits Directory* listed a Singapore Ladies' Rifle Association, with Lady Evelyn Young serving as its President.<sup>258</sup>

Asian ladies also established their own clubs, perhaps following the example set by the European members of the Ladies' Lawn Tennis Club. These clubs for Asian women included the Chinese Ladies' Association, the (Eurasian) Girls' Sports Club, and the Indian and Ceylonese Ladies' Club (which became the Lotus Club and then the Kamala Club). The Chinese Ladies' Association was in operation as early as 1917, with Mrs. Lee Choon Guan as its first President, and met at Magenta Cottage in Killiney Road.<sup>259</sup> Other Presidents of the Chinese Ladies' Association included Mrs. Lim Boon Keng in 1938, Mrs. Tay Lian Teck in 1948, and Mrs. Loh Poon Lip in 1950.<sup>260</sup> Mrs. Tan Chin Tuan served as the President of this Association when Mrs. Rosie Tan Kim Neo

---

<sup>252</sup> Regarding the *Padang Kechil*, see: G.M. Reith, *Handbook to Singapore*, Second Edition (1907), republished in 1985, pp. 41, 57-58, and 93.

<sup>253</sup> E.A. Brown, *Indiscreet Memories*, p. 38.

<sup>254</sup> 1906 *Straits Times Annual*, p. 75, Singapore National Library Lee Kong Chian Reference Library microfilm reel NL 7746.

<sup>255</sup> Arnold Wright and Thomas H. Reid, *The Malay Peninsula*, p. 225.

<sup>256</sup> Santry and Claude, *Salubrious Singapore*, p. 31; George Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, pp. 122-123.

<sup>257</sup> *British Malaya* (magazine), October 1932, p. 132.

<sup>258</sup> *The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1919*, p. 109, NUS microfilm reel R0011847.

<sup>259</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 541.

<sup>260</sup> Victor Sim, editor, *Biographies of Prominent Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 81, 86, and 91.

wrote her 1958 research paper on the Straits Chinese; by that time, most of the Chinese ladies in the Association were non-Straits Chinese.<sup>261</sup>

Twelve young Eurasian ladies established the Goldburn Sports Club in 1929, at the Goldburn house in Upper Serangoon Road. This club later moved to St. Michael's Road in 1930, and changed its name to the Girls' Sports Club or GSC. Among their other sporting activities, the members of the GSC played hockey at the Padang with a team of young British ladies. Thanks to the assistance of Dr. Noel Clarke, a prominent Eurasian who was a Member of the Legislative Council, the government decided to loan the GSC a plot of land in Serangoon Road in 1931. The club established its playing fields for hockey and tennis there, and built a pavilion. Dr. Clarke formally opened these facilities in 1932. These premises were ruined during the Japanese Occupation, but the club opened a new clubhouse there in 1954. This clubhouse was opened by Dr. C.J. Paglar, a leading Eurasian who was the President of the Singapore Recreation Club at that time. The Girls' Sports Club remained at this clubhouse until 1974.<sup>262</sup>

The Indian and Ceylonese Ladies' Club was founded in 1931 by an Indian lady named Mrs. E.V. Davies, who arrived in Singapore in 1925, and who became the first President of this club. The club's first Vice-President was Mrs. Fatima Jumabhoy, the wife of Rajabali Jumabhoy, who was a prominent Indian businessman and community leader. Within a few years of its founding, the name of the Indian and Ceylonese Ladies' Club was changed to the Lotus Club, and it welcomed Persian and Malay ladies as well

---

<sup>261</sup> Mrs. Rosie Tan Kim Neo, "The Straits Chinese in Singapore: A Study of the Straits Chinese Way of Life: A Research Paper for the Dept. of Social Studies University of Malaya 1958," p. 147.

<sup>262</sup> For an account of the history of the Girls' Sports Club, see: Valerie Barth, "Belonging: Eurasian Clubs and Associations," in: Myrna Braga-Blake, editor, with co-researcher Ann Ebert-Oehlers, *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes*, pp. 102-105.



as Indians.<sup>263</sup> The name of the Lotus Club was changed to the Kamala Club in 1950 to honour the wife of Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Lady Goode opened a new clubhouse for the Kamala Club in 1958.<sup>264</sup>

Even when elites belonged to clubs and associations which belonged to specific racial, national, or ethnic categories, such club membership still served to promote elite-level interracial social integration, since these memberships confirmed the social status of these elites and gave them something in common. The more likely that they could recognise one another as fellow elites, the more likely that they could meet and become acquainted as social equals. The possession of the status symbols of club memberships, together with similar interests in sports, gave Asian and European elites similar types of social and cultural credentials of elite status, and emphasised their social proximity to one another despite the cultural distance which likely often existed between different racial and ethnic categories. As these elites demonstrated that they were at least somewhat alike due to their shared interests in certain types of organised social and sporting activities, they showed their fellow elites that they were suitably prestigious and high-ranking to be potential guests who could be invited to banquets and other social functions, and as potential appointees to various important committees and boards. By involving themselves in clubs and associations – and especially by attaining leadership positions within them – elites could recognise one another as fellow elites who could gain in prestige through association with each other.

Although most clubs and associations in colonial Singapore seem to have been specific to certain racial identities, there were some prominent exceptions. The

---

<sup>263</sup> R.B. Krishnan, *Indians in Malaya: A Pageant of Greater India*, p. 31, and: Rajabali Jumabhoy, *Multiracial Singapore – On to the Nineties*, pp. 62 and 65.

<sup>264</sup> Rajabali Jumabhoy, *Multiracial Singapore – On to the Nineties*, pp. 65-66.

Singapore Chamber of Commerce started out as an organisation with a multiracial membership when it was established in 1837,<sup>265</sup> with Asian and European members.<sup>266</sup> The Masonic Lodge, one of the most prestigious social institutions in early Singapore, to which many of the leading Europeans here belonged, also included Indian Freemasons in the nineteenth century; at a Masonic banquet here in 1848, in celebration of the Annual Festival of the Sons of St. John, the European Freemasons of Singapore toasted their Indian brother mason, Brother Sorabjee, who replied with a speech.<sup>267</sup> Chinese business elites were closely interested in the horseracing activities sponsored by the Singapore Sporting Club from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, and continued this interest after this club became the Singapore Turf Club. One of the members of the Singapore Sporting Club was Seah Song Seah, a prominent local landowner who was a son of Seah Eu Chin.<sup>268</sup> Asian elites interested in horseracing in Singapore in the nineteenth century donated trophies for these races; Chinese horseracing enthusiasts contributed the Confucius Cup, the Singapore Chinese Cup, and the Celestial Plate,<sup>269</sup> Cheang Hong Lim donated the Hong Lim Cup,<sup>270</sup> Koh Cheng Hooi presented the Opium and Spirit Farmers'

---

<sup>265</sup> See the regulations and list of committee members, quoted from the minutes of a meeting of the Singapore Chamber of Commerce on 20 February 1837, in: T.J. Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account of the British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca*, Volume I, pp. 391-395.

<sup>266</sup> See, for example, the list of members of the Singapore Chamber of Commerce in the 1849 edition of *The Singapore Almanack, and Directory*, p. 26 (R0011768): the list includes Arab, Chinese, German, Jewish, Parsi, and Scottish names. See also: Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 40-41 and 46.

<sup>267</sup> *Singapore Free Press*, 4 January 1849, p. 3, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0006016. See also the mention of the prominent Parsi lawyer and Freemason Edaljee Khory, in: *Straits Times*, 22 November 1899, p. 3, R0016462, and in: Dato Sir Roland St. John Braddell, "Law and the Lawyers," in: Makepeace et al., eds., *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume One, p. 213.

<sup>268</sup> Arnold Wright and H.A. Cartwright, editors, *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya* (1908), p. 636.

<sup>269</sup> Confucius Cup: *Straits Times* 24 July 1869, p. 1, R0016422, and Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 154. Singapore Chinese Cup: *Straits Times* 28 June 1897, p. 3, R0016457. Celestial Plate: *Straits Times* 27 November 1869, p. 1, R0016422, and 13 May 1876, p. 2, R0016425, and Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 154.

<sup>270</sup> Cheang Hong Lim's Cup: *Straits Times* 13 May 1876, p. 2, R0016425; J.D. Vaughan, *Manners and Customs*, p. 42; and Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 154.

Cup,<sup>271</sup> and the gambier and pepper merchants donated the Kongkek Cup.<sup>272</sup> The Maharajah's Cup and the Sultan's Cup were the gifts of Johore royalty.<sup>273</sup> The Arab Cup and the Coromandel Vase were contributed by Arabs and Indians respectively,<sup>274</sup> while the Parsee Cup was the gift of members of that community.<sup>275</sup> Asian elites continued to be interested in this horseracing club after its name was changed from the Singapore Sporting Club to the Singapore Turf Club in 1924; E.S. Manasseh was the Acting Chairman of the Turf Club when it opened its new racecourse at Bukit Timah in 1933.<sup>276</sup>

During the nineteenth century, there were Chinese members in the Agricultural Society,<sup>277</sup> the Straits Settlements Association,<sup>278</sup> and the Singapore Club.<sup>279</sup> The Singapore Volunteer Rifle Corps, which was founded in 1854,<sup>280</sup> included Eurasians (such as Edwin Tessensohn) as well as Europeans among its ranks of volunteer soldiers for some time during the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>281</sup> The Straits Asiatic Society, which was founded in the Raffles Library in 1877 and became the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society in 1878,<sup>282</sup> was evidently open to Asian as well as European

---

<sup>271</sup> Koh Cheng Hooi's Opium and Spirit Farmers' Cup: *Singapore Daily Times* 10 January 1882, p. 3, R0010200.

<sup>272</sup> Kongkek Cup: *Straits Times* 1 May 1880, p. 1, R0016427, and Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 154. The *Kongkek* was the Pepper and Gambier Society founded in Singapore in 1867; see: Chiang Hai Ding, *A History of Straits Settlements Foreign Trade 1870-1915*, p. 52.

<sup>273</sup> Sultan's Cup: *Straits Times* 28 June 1897, p. 3, R0016457. Maharajah's Cup: *Straits Times* 24 April 1880, p. 2, R0016427.

<sup>274</sup> Arab Cup and Coromandel Vase: *Straits Times* 24 April 1880, p. 2, R0016427.

<sup>275</sup> Parsee Cup: *Straits Times* 13 May 1876, p. 2, R0016425.

<sup>276</sup> *Malaya Tribune*, 17 April 1933, p. 12, R0005904.

<sup>277</sup> *The Royal Almanack & Directory for the year 1860*, p. 46; and: Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 160.

<sup>278</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 242.

<sup>279</sup> *The Royal Almanac & Directory for the year 1864*, p. 53.

<sup>280</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel G.A. Derrick, "Singapore Volunteers," in: Walter Makepeace et al., eds., *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume One, p. 384.

<sup>281</sup> A.H. Carlos, "Eurasian Volunteers," in: Walter Makepeace, Gilbert E. Brooke, and Roland St. J. Braddell, editors, *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume One, p. 392; Valerie Barth, "Belonging: Eurasian Clubs and Associations," in: Myrna Braga-Blake, ed., with co-researcher Ann Ebert-Oehlers, *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes*, p. 105.

<sup>282</sup> Choy Chee Meh, "History of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*. Volume 68, Part 2 (December 1995), p. 87.

members;<sup>283</sup> Tan Kim Ching (a son of Tan Tock Seng) was elected to membership in this Society in 1878,<sup>284</sup> and Seah Song Seah was reportedly an enthusiastic member in the early years of the twentieth century.<sup>285</sup> Dr. Lim Boon Keng was active in the Straits Philosophical Society *circa* 1900, and served as President of this organisation, which included prominent Europeans.<sup>286</sup> In the 1930s, leading Asians and Europeans founded two prestigious multiracial clubs: the Singapore Rotary Club in 1930,<sup>287</sup> and the Singapore Island Club, which opened its clubhouse and golf course in 1932. The Island Club's cosmopolitan membership included Chinese and Eurasians, Europeans and Indians, as well as Japanese and Malays, when Governor Sir Cecil Clementi presided over this club's opening ceremony in 1932.<sup>288</sup>

Asian and European members of prestigious clubs and associations found a variety of opportunities for interracial and inter-club cooperation and interaction. For example, they could interact in fundraising activities for charitable causes, such as the Transvaal War Fund in 1899.<sup>289</sup> They could also interact during inter-club sporting competitions, such as tennis,<sup>290</sup> football,<sup>291</sup> and water polo.<sup>292</sup> Finally – and most

---

<sup>283</sup> Wurtzburg, C.E. (?), "Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society," *British Malaya* magazine, June 1948, p. 27. (The author of this article is listed as C.E.W.) See also, for example, the Asian and European names in the list of members in: *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume 8, Part 1 (April 1930), pp. viii-xxxi.

<sup>284</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 193.

<sup>285</sup> Arnold Wright and H.A. Cartwright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya* (1908), p. 636.

<sup>286</sup> Walter Makepeace, "Institutions and Clubs," in: Walter Makepeace, Gilbert E. Brooke, and Roland St. J. Braddell, editors, *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume Two, Chapter XVII, p. 302.

<sup>287</sup> Leo Cresson, assisted by Walter Rintoul, Keki Medora, and Kitty Aeria, *Rotary Club of Singapore 1930-1980*, pp. 7-10.

<sup>288</sup> *British Malaya* magazine, October 1932, p. 132, and: *Malaya Tribune*, 29 August 1932, p. 10, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0005899.

<sup>289</sup> *Straits Times*, 21 November 1899, p. 3, and 8 December 1899, p. 3, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016462.

<sup>290</sup> N.G. Aplin and Quek Jin Jong, "Celestials in Touch: Sport and the Chinese in Colonial Singapore," in: J.A. Mangan and Fan Hong, editors. *Sport in Asian Society: Past and Present*, p. 86 and endnote 63 on p. 97; Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 481.

<sup>291</sup> *Malaya Tribune*, 15 May 1924, p. 8, R0005841.

spectacularly – they could interact in the organisation and celebration of the spectacular royal and imperial pageants which occurred from time to time.

The following list shows the dates of the royal visits and other selected important imperial events in the history of colonial Singapore, beginning with Lord Dalhousie's visit in 1850:

**Chronology:**

- 1850 Visit of Governor-General Lord Dalhousie
- 1850 Horsburgh Lighthouse on Pedra Branca dedicated on Queen Victoria's birthday
- 1857 Visit of High Commissioner Lord Elgin
- 1858 Public Reading of Queen Victoria's Proclamation
- 1867 Ceremonial inauguration of the Crown Colony
- 1869 Visit of Prince Alfred, the Duke of Edinburgh
- 1882 Visit of Prince Albert Victor and Prince George (later King George V)
- 1887 Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee and the unveiling of the Raffles Statue
- 1889 Unveiling of Queen Victoria's Statue at Government House
- 1890 Visit of Prince Arthur and Princess Louise, the Duke and Duchess of Connaught
- 1897 Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee
- 1900 Mafeking Day victory celebration
- 1900 Pretoria Day victory celebration
- 1901 Proclamation of the accession of King Edward VII
- 1901 Visit of Prince George and Princess Mary, the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York (later King George V and Queen Mary)

---

<sup>292</sup> N.G. Aplin and Quek Jin Jong, "Celestials in Touch: Sport and the Chinese in Colonial Singapore," in: J.A. Mangan and Fan Hong, editors. *Sport in Asian Society: Past and Present*, p. 90.

*Imperial Monarchy and the Theatre of Prestige*

- 1902 Coronation of King Edward VII
- 1906 Visit of Prince Arthur of Connaught (son of the Duke and Duchess of Connaught)
- 1907 Visit of Prince Arthur and Princess Louise, the Duke and Duchess of Connaught
- 1910 Proclamation of the accession of King George V
- 1911 Coronation of King George V
- 1911 Visit of Prince Alexander and Princess Alice of Teck
- 1918 World War One Armistice celebration
- 1919 Centenary of the Settlement of Singapore
- 1922 Visit of Prince Edward, the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VIII)
- 1929 Visit of Prince Henry, the Duke of Gloucester
- 1935 Silver Jubilee of King George V
- 1936 Proclamation of the accession of King Edward VIII
- 1936 Proclamation of the accession of King George VI
- 1937 Coronation of King George VI
- 1945 Arrival of Lord Mountbatten, Supreme Allied Commander of Southeast Asia
- 1952 Proclamation of the accession of Queen Elizabeth II
- 1952 Visit of Princess Marina, the Duchess of Kent, and her son, the Duke of Kent
- 1953 Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II
- 1959 Visit of Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh

(In addition to these out-of-the-ordinary imperial celebrations listed above, there were also the routine annual celebrations of royal birthdays, which often took place at the Padang and at Government House.)

Royal and Imperial celebrations in colonial Singapore included Asians and Europeans of different levels of status – the masses as well as elites – as both actors and spectators, and provided opportunities for elite-level cooperative social interaction. These celebrations brought large numbers of people together, some as active participants in the performances of the celebrations, and many others as spectators whose attention was focused on the parades and other rituals that took place in the streets, on the Padang, or in other public places. The large numbers of spectators who gathered to watch these rituals provided the elites with opportunities to gain a high degree of publicity and visibility for their prominence in organising the ceremonies. While these crowds may have been drawn by the spectacular parades, for the elites there was an additional reason to attend: the presence of large audiences which gave the elites, in effect, a stage upon which to display and assert their elite status with the maximum of publicity. This publicity could further enhance the prestige available to the elites who participated, even beyond the prestige they gained by interacting with, and being recognised and included by, their fellow elites.

During these events, Asian and European elites publicly demonstrated their capabilities and leadership roles in the organisations which planned and carried out the celebrations. In this way, they publicly asserted and displayed their elite status to their fellow elites of different races, as well as to the general public, including even those who were illiterate, and were thus unable to follow the newspaper accounts which chronicled elite activities on a daily or weekly basis for the literate portion of the population.<sup>293</sup> The appreciation of spectacular public rituals and ceremonies and the comprehension of what

---

<sup>293</sup> According to Sir Richard Winstedt, there was a literacy rate of 47.6 percent among the males in the Colony's urban population in 1936. Sir Richard Winstedt, *British Malaya* magazine, March 1938, p. 269.

these events said about the social structure did not require literacy on the part of the audience; as Clifford Geertz explained, such celebrations were *texts* that were available to be read<sup>294</sup> – but, unlike the *written* texts found in books and newspapers, the texts that were *performed* in spectacular public rituals of the Crown and the Empire could be understood by the masses, even if they had received no formal education. These performed *texts* were accessible to everyone who chose to attend these public celebrations. These events presented images of the social order to the public, as well as providing the elites with opportunities to interact with one another, while asserting their organisational abilities and leadership status as individuals.

Spectacular public rituals were important means for the creation of the public imagery of the colonial social order or structure, and the investment of the ceremonial centre of this structure with prestige and legitimacy. Part of this imagery had to do with the envisioning of colonial society as an hierarchy, linked vertically to the Crown in the imperial centre, as David Cannadine explained in his book, entitled *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*.<sup>295</sup> Clearly, royal and imperial celebrations in colonial Singapore brought large numbers of people together in demonstrations of loyalty to the Crown and the Empire, whether actively or passively, and must have influenced the way in which people thought about the colonial society in which they lived, and, more broadly, about the vast Empire to which they belonged. In addition, and more specifically, these events helped to create and enhance the public image of the local cosmopolitan elite class here. In *Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image*, Maurizio Peleggi has explained how the modernising

---

<sup>294</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*, p. 135.

<sup>295</sup> See: David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*, especially pp. 22, 32, 45, 65, 85, 86, 90, 98, 100, 102, 104, 106, 112, and 122.



Siamese elite employed pageantry to assert their public image as a *modern* elite.<sup>296</sup>

Takashi Fujitani has shown how nineteenth-century Japanese elites shaped new public imagery of their monarchy, to create a sense of Japan as a modern, unified nation-state, and as a leading imperial power on the world stage, in his book, entitled *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan*.

In colonial Singapore, spectacular imperial rituals fostered a public image of the elite class as a unified and cosmopolitan entity, including leading Asians as well as Europeans, who cooperated closely in organising demonstrations of loyalty to the Crown and the Empire. Meanwhile, at the individual level, these elites simultaneously demonstrated their own personal capabilities and leadership status, the effectiveness of the organisations which they led, and their membership and leadership within this cosmopolitan elite class. These ceremonial events displayed, for the viewing of the general public as well as the elites, the nature of the elite social structure in colonial Singapore, as well as the fact that certain Asians and Europeans held elite status. These colonial rituals confirmed which individuals were accepted and included as members belonging to the colonial cosmopolitan elite class, the multiracial community of prestige at the centre of this colonial society.

When Chinese leaders organised massive Chinese processions in honour of British royal and imperial celebrations, these Chinese elites not only expressed their loyalty towards the Empire, but also publicly asserted their position and importance within the colonial system. The fact that Europeans welcomed and encouraged Chinese participation in what were basically European-oriented imperial celebrations indicated

---

<sup>296</sup> Maurizio Peleggi, *Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image*, pp. 3 and 14.

that the European elites accepted the Chinese assertions of membership and joint leadership rights in the colonial society. The vast numbers of Chinese who participated meant that the Chinese, in some sense, made these celebrations their own, while still affirming their loyalty to the Empire and the colonial authorities. Chinese processions showed that Chinese leaders were actively involved in the colonial society, and that they held real authority and leadership within the Chinese population; the Chinese processions displayed the authority of Chinese leaders in such a way that it could not possibly be overlooked. These Chinese leaders participated in a process in which Asian and European elites fostered a public image of the colonial system, which presented them as belonging to, and jointly leading, the colonial society which developed here from 1819 onwards. Since these spectacular events were held in the streets and other public places, they attracted huge numbers of Asian onlookers, as reported in the Chinese-language and English-language newspapers at the time. The attendance of large numbers of Chinese and other Asian spectators at these events indicates that these imperial celebrations were of interest to the Asian masses as well as to the Asian elites, and that these events were good opportunities for Chinese and other Asian elites to publicly assert their elite status to the Asian masses, as well as to their fellow Asian and European elites.

While public celebrations of the Crown and the Empire in colonial Singapore were ostensibly held to celebrate the prestige of these European institutions, they were also, in fact, at least as much celebrations of the strength of the Asian presence in the colonial society here, and of Asian and especially Chinese local organisational ability. Descriptions of various parades here in honour of the Crown and the Empire over the years indicate that the vast majority of the people who paraded were actually Chinese,

especially in the magnificent Chinese lantern processions which were such prominent elements of the imperial celebrations. In addition to the Chinese, other Asians paraded as well, and Chinese and other Asians also contributed greatly to street decorations along the parade routes, such as the building of distinctive triumphal archways spanning major streets. Moreover, it should be no surprise that the vast majority of the crowds of spectators who watched these parades in this mostly Chinese and overwhelmingly Asian city were Chinese and other Asians. The presence of large crowds of these Asian spectators were occasionally mentioned in contemporary accounts of these celebrations, such as during the royal visits of: Prince Alfred, the Duke of Edinburgh, in 1869;<sup>297</sup> Prince Albert Victor and Prince George in 1882;<sup>298</sup> Prince George and Princess Mary, the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York, in 1901;<sup>299</sup> Prince Henry, the Duke of Gloucester, in 1929; and Princess Marina, the Duchess of Kent, and her son the Duke of Kent, in 1952;<sup>300</sup> to name just a few examples. If the crowds of Asian spectators were not mentioned even more frequently or described in even greater detail, it was probably because the presence of many Asian audiences at these events really went without saying – it was natural and only to be expected that, in a city with an almost entirely Asian population, the Asian masses would attend these public imperial celebrations, which were clearly intended to attract the attention of everyone, not just the tiny European minority here.

Royal and imperial celebrations combined the celebrations of the prestige of European imperial authority and its symbols with ritualised public assertions of the

---

<sup>297</sup> *Straits Times*, 4 December 1869, p. 1, R0016422.

<sup>298</sup> *Singapore Daily Times*, 11 January 1882, p. 2, R0010200.

<sup>299</sup> *Straits Times*, 23 April 1901, p. 2, R0016465.

<sup>300</sup> *Straits Times*, 2 October 1952, p. 1, R0016838.

numerical strength and organisational capability of the Chinese and other Asian communities, as well as the prestige and authority of their leaders, within the colonial system and its social structure. These assertions were witnessed firsthand by the crowds of mostly Asian spectators in the streets, and then repeated in written form in newspaper reports on these events. Imperial celebrations received detailed and extensive coverage in the local Chinese-language newspapers, such as the *Lat Pau*, the *Sin Kok Min Jit Pao*, the *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, and the *Nanyang Chung Wei Pao*, as well as the local English-language newspapers: the *Singapore Chronicle*, *Singapore Free Press*, *Straits Times*, and *Malaya Tribune*. The royal and imperial celebrations provided Asian and European elites with excellent opportunities to publicly display their rank, demonstrate their leadership ability, and confirm their elite status by showing everyone that they were able to organise impressive public rituals – in much the same way that Balinese rulers traditionally made their status real by staging spectacular ceremonies.<sup>301</sup> During these imperial pageants, Asian and European leaders interacted with one another in organising committees, and recognised one another's membership status in the local cosmopolitan elite class. The leaders of Chinese organisations seem to have been quite eager and willing to take part in these imperial public celebrations – and no wonder, since these events were such excellent opportunities for them to gain recognition and enhance their prestige in the eyes of all communities, and to publicly affirm their elite status.

The theatrical medium of these public ritual performances – which were sanctioned by the colonial state, yet included private-sector Asian and European organisations – displayed the actual nature of the colonial system in Singapore,<sup>302</sup>

---

<sup>301</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*, p. 120.

<sup>302</sup> See: David Cannadine, *Class in Britain*, pp. 48-49, 63, and 85; and: *Ornamentalism*, p. 122.

including its hierarchical, multiracial, and elite-centred characteristics, and the cooperation and interdependence of its diverse elements: Asian and European, unofficial or private-sector as well as official or public sector. The celebrations – like the colonial system as a whole – were officially under European authority, but their success as spectacular events depended on the willing cooperation and involvement of Asian elites and their institutions and the voluntary participation of the Asian masses as marchers and spectators. These local imperial extravaganzas enhanced the prestige of the local Asian leaders and their organisations, as well as their European counterparts, and the overwhelming Asian presence of marchers and spectators paralleled the equally overwhelming Asian majority in the population of colonial Singapore. The ritual interactions among the Asians and Europeans were characterised by willing cooperation and mutual benefit, rather than coercion and conflict. The leading Asian and European elites naturally enjoyed the most benefits from such interaction, but the masses evidently felt that their participation or attendance was sufficiently rewarding to encourage their presence at these celebrations, just as so many of them evidently considered the working and living conditions in colonial Singapore to be such that it was advantageous to them to immigrate and settle here.

These royal and imperial pageants encapsulated in public performances the character of the colonial system here, centred on elite-level partnership between Asian and European leaders and decision-makers. The ritualised creation and distribution of social rewards in the form of symbolic capital to Asian and European elites during these celebrations paralleled the formation and allocation of both material and symbolic rewards in the colonial system of Singapore and its Malayan hinterland as a whole,

through the close cooperation of these Asian and European elites. For everyone who attended these celebrations, including the active participants in the parades, as well as the spectators who lined the streets, these events not only displayed the local hierarchy of Asian and European leaders<sup>303</sup> and made their status socially real,<sup>304</sup> they also conveyed a clear public message: *this* was how the colonial system operated in this place – through a joint effort of Asians and Europeans, led by their own elites, with the masses participating voluntarily and, for the most part, compliantly accepting the system.

The celebrations put the system of social rewards – the prize list and the rules of the game, so to speak – on public display, in such a way as to encourage the continued cooperation of these elites; thus, while these events celebrated the continuity of royal and imperial traditions from the past, they also served to foster the continuity of the colonial social system into the future, as that future was anticipated at that time. It would likely have occurred to ambitious young Asians watching these parades that they might one day become successful businessmen and the leaders of their communities, and then it would be their turn to take part in organising celebrations, demonstrating their community leadership and receiving the glory of public recognition. By showing how community leadership roles were rewarded with public prominence, the celebrations encouraged Asian businessmen who had achieved success to take a greater role in certain organisations. The striving of ambitious Asian businessmen for the prestige of leadership roles in their own community organisations channelled their energy into forming and strengthening these organisations, and interacting in cooperation with the elites of other sections of the population – thus, their ambition was directed towards the cultivation of

---

<sup>303</sup> See: David Cannadine, *Class in Britain*, pp. 48-49, 63, and 85; and: *Ornamentalism*, p. 122.

<sup>304</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*, p. 120.

the cohesion of the multiracial elite class and the location of this class at the centre of the colonial society. The celebrations demonstrated how business success could be converted into the prestige of public prominence and interaction with political elites, even as they showed how much the colonial system depended on the involvement of the Chinese masses and other Asians, and on the cooperation of Asian elites.

These imperial pageants revealed the location of the elite centre of colonial society: in the cooperative interaction of the leaders of public-sector, private-sector, and civil society organisations. The celebrations were not only imperial assemblages, displaying the social linkages connecting Singapore to the imperial crown in the metropolitan centre of the Empire;<sup>305</sup> they were also – and at least as importantly – theatrical displays of the local colonial society here in Singapore, centred on a multiracial elite class, and involving the Asian masses as willing and apparently enthusiastic participants and audience members. The celebrations exhibited a colonial social structure which was not only hierarchical and elite-led, but which was also open to talented and ambitious individuals from among the Asian masses, who could follow the famous example of Raffles by achieving elite status through their own efforts, and then be accepted as new partners in the colonial joint venture between Asian and European elites.

The prominent role of the Asian elites – and especially the leaders of the Chinese organisations – in these imperial celebrations, and the fact that Asian elites derived prestige in the form of public recognition and validation of their status through their apparently willing cooperation in royal and imperial rituals, raises some questions about just how *European* was the so-called European colonial system here. Colonial Singapore was actually colonised as much by Chinese elites and other Asian elites as it was by

---

<sup>305</sup> See: David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*.

Europeans.<sup>306</sup> The apparently voluntary and even enthusiastic participation of the Asian masses in these celebrations – both as marchers in the parades and as spectators – who chose either to take part in or to observe these imperial rituals paralleled the choices that Asian immigrants made in leaving China, India, Sumatra, and other places, and settling in Singapore. This raises another question about the nature of the colonial system here – was it really about Asians being subjugated or colonised,<sup>307</sup> if the Asians chose to move here and to participate in – and to help build – this system? Impoverished Chinese and Indian peasant immigrants flocked to Singapore, Malaya, and other places in the Nanyang, much as impoverished European peasants flocked to North and South America,<sup>308</sup> Australia, and New Zealand during the same era.

While the imperial pageants asserted and displayed the overarching unity and cooperation of the leaders of the different races and ethnicities and their organisations in these shared ritual experiences, they simultaneously highlighted the diversity of the cosmopolitan population as a whole, with different sections represented distinctly in the parades and by their own grand triumphal arches over the streets. The imperial celebrations displayed the local culturally-plural society not as one Singaporean people, but rather as different types of Singaporeans, coexisting and, for the most part at least, cooperating harmoniously. The huge Chinese processions within these imperial celebrations demonstrated the majority status of the Chinese population on this island,

---

<sup>306</sup> John Carroll has described the Chinese of Hong Kong as *colonizers* as well as *colonized*. Carroll, *Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong*, p. 191.

<sup>307</sup> Bryna Goodman, “Improvisations on a Semicolonial Theme, or, How to Read a Celebration of Transnational Urban Community,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, Volume 59, Number 4 (November 2000), p. 920.

<sup>308</sup> See: K.G. Tregonning, *A History of Modern Malaya*, p. 175. Sir Stamford Raffles suggested that Borneo and other islands might become a destination for Chinese immigrants and colonists, as America was for Europeans. See: Sir Stamford Raffles, “Minutes by Sir T.S. Raffles, On The Establishment of a Malay College at Singapore. 1819.” In: Lady Raffles, *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles*, Appendix, pp. 29-30.



while the participation of other races showed that they were part of the local social structure as well. One of the most characteristic features of the imperial celebrations is that they were inclusive – they left no doubt in the eyes of the spectators that all sections of the cosmopolitan population, the masses as well as the elites, were included in these imperial extravaganzas, just as they showcased the identity and status of the leading Asians and Europeans who were positioned at the apex of the colonial society. As Bernard Cohn has explained, such expressions of diversity in public rituals implicitly asserted the essential function of imperial authority in providing a unifying elite centre for the multiracial colonial society.<sup>309</sup>

The diverse casts of these imperial public celebrations were graphic reminders that the society of colonial Singapore consisted not of one people, but rather of a number of peoples unified within one colonial system, centred on the Asian and European elites and the institutions which they created and led. Thus, the elites not only asserted their prestige, but also emphasised their essential role in a system which provided a degree of unity as well as overall stability and order – the preconditions for economic development and success – in a context of potentially divisive cultural diversity. This was a utilitarian justification or legitimation for the status and authority of the multiracial elite class. The massive imperial celebrations with their huge and culturally-diverse casts were metaphors for the whole colonial system here, from the viewpoint of the elites – the cooperation of these elites organised and balanced the diverse society, just as their cooperation produced the orderly parades in which all sections were included and represented in the roles assigned to them by the elites.

---

<sup>309</sup> Bernard S. Cohn, “Representing Authority in Victorian India,” in: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, editors, *The Invention of Tradition*, pp. 193-194.

The imperial celebrations were examples of a concept which is no less true for being paradoxical: the fact that an effective way of managing cultural differences, minimising tensions and integrating different sections of the population into the larger society, is to openly recognise, acknowledge, and celebrate the presence of these diverse identities, and incorporate them into the institutional system as well as the imperial theatre of prestige. The racially and ethnically diverse population was able to accomplish a degree of integration as one society (rather than a Furnivallian plural society) because leading members of the various ethnic sections were able to group together into associations which could then foster interethnic linkages with the parallel organisations of all ethnic sections at the elite level. Internal cohesion within each cultural section of the population, each with their own organisations and leaders, could contribute to overarching linkages, as these organisations would provide each section with accredited leaders or representatives, so to speak, who could network with their counterparts at the summit level, in the centre of the society.

Here is the crux of the paradox: a system in which each section can organise and define itself along cultural lines may be more apt to integrate inter-ethnically at the elite level; so, the acceptance and celebration of diversity in the general population can contribute to cohesion at the centre of society.<sup>310</sup> This was not a case of divide-and-rule – it was, instead, a recognition and acceptance of the reality of pre-existing ethnic distinctions and different identities (which has evidently been characteristic of the Southeast Asian region since long before the era of European colonialism),<sup>311</sup> and the

---

<sup>310</sup> Arend Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation*, p. 112; Peter M. Blau and Joseph E. Schwartz, *Crosscutting Social Circles*, pp. 14, 15, and 167; Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, pp. 9-38.

<sup>311</sup> Emily Sadka, *The Protected Malay States 1874-1895*, p. 323.

management and accommodation of this ethnic diversity by incorporating the leaderships of different sections into a system of summit-level connections among elites. Social integration can be promoted, paradoxically, by the activities of organisations which assert cultural diversity, if the elites of those organisations can cultivate overarching connections with their fellow elites of different ethnic sections of the population.

The imperial celebrations were grand occasions for Asian and European elites to cooperate in the creation and exchange of symbolic capital. By staging these events in the colonial theatre of prestige, Asian and European elites cultivated a form of symbolic capital – namely, mutual recognition and public assertion of elite status through participation together in the planning and performance of the celebrations. They made this symbolic capital especially symbolically valuable to themselves by making it highly visible to the public, both in the actual rituals in the streets and other public places, and in the subsequent reports of the proceedings in the Chinese-language and English-language local newspapers, which were themselves controlled by the Asian and European elites. By associating together during these rituals, the members of the multiracial elite class engaged in the exchange of symbolic capital involved in recognising and accepting one another's elite status and their fellow membership and ascendancy in the centre of the colonial society. The exchange of symbolic capital on the *individual* level translated into an exchange on the *institutional* level, since the status of these elites was conferred by the prestigious organisations to which they belonged and in which they held rank. By recognising one another's elite status, they implicitly recognised the legitimacy and authority of their respective public-sector and private-sector status-conferring organisations – governmental departments, the Legislative Council, the Municipal

## *Imperial Monarchy and the Theatre of Prestige*

Commission, and various boards and committees with elite members, as well as prestigious associations and clubs. The local theatre of imperial prestige promoted the institutional integration of the central organisational system, as well as fostering the social integration of the individual members of the cosmopolitan elite class.

Although these imperial celebrations were not everyday occurrences, they were nevertheless not *socially* exceptional, because they were spectacular manifestations of the established social structures and the routine processes of elite-level cooperation and mass compliance, which operated here every day – the elites usually cooperated with one another, and the masses usually complied with elite authority. The imperial celebrations presented everyday social realities in a ceremonial and theatrical fashion for all to see. Hence, they were far more representative of ordinary daily social life than the riots which broke out from time to time – for example, the riots between Chinese of different *pangs* or dialect-speaking groups. Those riots were all the more remarkable at the time, and therefore apt to attract the attention of chroniclers of the past, precisely because they were exceptional and dramatic events of violence and disorder which were not representative of the normal and basically stable and peaceful everyday social life in colonial Singapore. If the riots *had* been routine and typical of social life here, then colonial Singapore could not have experienced the economic development and steady population growth that it did, decade after decade; nor, for that matter, could the Asian and European elites have enjoyed the steady accumulation of economic and symbolic capital as they did, generation after generation.

The imperial celebrations as historical artefacts are more important to understanding what *really* happened in the colonial era than the occasional outbreaks of

rioting. The amount of ink devoted to imperial celebrations in the Chinese-language and English-language newspapers of the colonial era, as well as the reportedly massive crowds of people who attended these events, suggest that the people who lived here in the past attached great importance to these events. Newspaper reporters and editors in the colonial era likely devoted special attention to those events which they believed would be of interest to their readers. Historians of the twenty-first century should beware any tendency to overemphasise dramatic instances of conflict, such as riots, at the expense of properly appreciating the routine patterns of elite-level cooperation and mass compliance, or to underemphasise other events, such as the imperial celebrations, which were clearly very important to many of the people of those times, and which were probably far more informative about the ordinary day-to-day operation of the colonial system here than the exceptional instances of disorder. A more balanced view of colonial social history, with due regard for the crucial themes of elite-level interethnic cooperation and mass compliance, should prevent any misinterpretation of the colonial era as having been mainly characterised by conflict, strife, and resistance.

The apparently voluntary and predominantly civilian character of the imperial celebrations epitomised elements of the colonial system here. While the contingents of soldiers who marched in the parades (including regular troops from the garrison as well as local volunteers) demonstrated the military power of the colonial state, the far larger numbers of Asian civilian participants – for example, in the massive Chinese lantern processions – presented an overall picture of willing participation in royal and imperial celebrations, under Asian leadership. These were ritual displays of a society characterised by cosmopolitan cooperation and mutual benefit in terms of symbolic

capital, guided by a multiracial elite leadership – rather than the themes of conflict, resistance, or coercion, which have been privileged in some studies of colonial history. Of course, this is not to deny that these disagreeable elements were present in the colonial society, as they are most likely to be found in *all* societies, past and present – but they were not the key dynamics here. The central dynamic here was of Asians and Europeans choosing to interact and cooperate, making connections for their own reasons, to accomplish their goals with regard to the enhancement of their material and symbolic wealth.

In the same way that these imperial celebrations were largely Asian (indeed, probably most of the participants were Chinese), and in the same way that they were under the direction of Asian and European elites, so too may the colonial system itself be seen as having been more Asian than European; the system involved more Asians than Europeans, and it was directed by a multiracial elite class. Chinese and other Asian elites deserve ample recognition for their active participation in organising the imperial celebrations, an involvement which was apparently voluntary and enthusiastic and which gave these imperial extravaganzas their largely Asian flavour, to be witnessed by huge crowds of mostly Asian spectators. These imperial celebrations were vivid and spectacular demonstrations and examples of how the Asian elite actively contributed to the colonial system, helping to shape it and deriving wealth and prestige from it. The colonial system may have been called *European*, but the system actually belonged to (and benefited) a multiracial class of Asian and European elites, who were linked together by their cooperation in acquiring symbolic capital as well as economic rewards.

*Imperial Monarchy and the Theatre of Prestige*

For some people who grew up after the end of the colonial era and who may have developed an image of the colonial era as a time when all Asians were exploited, it may be difficult to accept a picture of the colonial system here as a system which worked, more or less, for many people in the past, especially for wealthy Chinese capitalists and other Asian business elites; yet the exploration of this system's social history suggests that it would be no more correct to demonise it than to idealise it – it was no more a dystopia than a utopia. It was, instead, a place where the social, economic, and political realities were such that the vast immigrant majority found it to be at least acceptable, as well as preferable to the places from which they had migrated, and where a privileged stratum found conditions to be quite conducive to their achievement of material and symbolic rewards. This balanced view of the colonial system – as a social, political, and economic order that was neither dystopian nor utopian, but somewhere in between – is consistent with the facts that migrants continued to flock here year after year, from China, India, Sumatra, the Malay Peninsula, and elsewhere, and often settled here; that some became wealthy and established family lineages and other institutions which endured for generations; and that the system itself managed to endure for one hundred and forty years, including the trauma of three-and-a-half-year interruption during the brutal wartime Japanese military occupation.

It might be easy to look back on any society or polity in any time or place and view it simplistically as either all bad or all good; but it should be no surprise to historians and other scholars that the actual conditions in the past were usually somewhere between these two extremes. Value judgements about whether the colonial system was, on balance, good or bad, are best left to the readers; the task of the historian

is to explain how and why certain developments occurred, rather than contributing to either pro-colonial or anti-colonial myths or propaganda.<sup>312</sup> An historian who approaches colonial history with either a pro-colonial or anti-colonial value judgement in mind may be unable to make a balanced and objective appraisal, just as E.J. Hobsbawm noted the difficulty faced by any ardent nationalist who tries to study the history of nationalism.<sup>313</sup> For any political and social system not based primarily on coercive force, the key to understanding its operation is to explore how and why most of the population usually went along with the system – either by actively cooperating and eagerly contributing to it, or else by compliantly accepting its terms most of the time.<sup>314</sup> An exploration of social history may help to answer these questions.

The concept of the development of the multiracial elite class did not mean that Asian elites were thereby brought into a relationship of subordination to the colonial state, any more than were their European elite counterparts here. It would be an oversimplification to privilege the role of coercive force and subordination in the colonial system;<sup>315</sup> there was much more to it than that. In fact, the coercive force of the military and police power of the colonial authorities was rather limited during much of the colonial era, as demonstrated by difficulties experienced in the suppression of riots in the

---

<sup>312</sup> See John Bastin's discussion of the task of historians, with special regard to Southeast Asia, in: John Bastin, *The Study of Modern Southeast Asian History: An Inaugural Lecture delivered in the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur on 14 December 1959*, especially pp. 15-19.

<sup>313</sup> E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>314</sup> See: Pierre Bourdieu, "Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field," in: *Practical Reason*, p. 56.

<sup>315</sup> For examples of the highlighting of the role of coercive force in colonial Singapore, see: Chua Beng-Huat, "Decoding the Political in Civic Spaces: An Interpretive Essay," in: Chua Beng-Huat and Norman Edwards, editors, *Public Space: Design, Use and Management*, p. 58; Chua Beng Huat, "The Changing Shape of Civil Society in Singapore." *Commentary, Journal of The National University of Singapore Society*, Volume 11, Number 1 (1993), p. 11; and: Ananda Rajah, "Making and Managing Tradition in Singapore: The National Day Parade," in: *Our Place in Time: Exploring Heritage and Memory in Singapore*, p. 102.



nineteenth century;<sup>316</sup> serious riots occurred even as late as the 1950s.<sup>317</sup> These facts point to the importance of non-coercive factors in the colonial system, and especially to the cooperation of Asian elites and their organisations. The participation of Asian elites in the imperial celebrations – like their role in the colonial system here as a whole – was actually the result of a willing agreement of Asian and European elites to work together in partnership for their mutual benefit, as well as the compliance of the masses with the authority of the elites. The celebrations were spectacular representations of interdependence among these elites.

By accepting the participation of Asian elites and their organisations in the celebration of the Empire and the Crown, the European elites thereby acknowledged the membership of the Chinese and other Asian elites in the elite class, and of prestigious Asian organisations in the elite institutional system. In effect, the European elites welcomed their Asian counterparts to *join the club*, figuratively speaking – to become members of the inner circle which had the privilege of staging the ritual performances of the imperial theatre of prestige. Membership in this inner circle, confirmed by participation in these rituals, conferred prestige and status upon these elites, regardless of their race. In addition to representing colonial and imperial authority and prestige, these performances showcased the private-sector organisations, some of which were led by prominent Asian businessmen and professional elites, and others by the European private-sector elites. Extravanzas of royalty and the Empire displayed and exalted the

---

<sup>316</sup> Regarding the limitations of colonial military and police power in nineteenth-century Singapore, and the difficulty experienced by the colonial authorities in suppressing riots, see: Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, pp. 32-47; John N. Miksic, "From Fieldworks to Fort Canning 1823-1866," in: Malcolm H. Murfett, John N. Miksic, Brian P. Farrell, and Chiang Ming Shun, *Between Two Oceans: A Military History of Singapore From First Settlement to Final British Withdrawal*, pp. 63 and 67.

<sup>317</sup> C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*, pp. 242, 255, and 258.

ascendancy of non-governmental elites and institutions as well as colonial officialdom and the Empire, emphasising their partnership in the colonial system and its nature as a joint venture of Asian and European elites. The interaction among these elites in the planning and performance of the celebrations, together with the publication of their names in the Chinese-language and English-language newspapers, represented and affirmed the social reality of the cosmopolitan elite class as an integrated social entity, a multiracial community of prestige at the very centre of the colonial system here.

The interest of elites in colonial Singapore in enhancing their prestige through cooperative interaction in gatherings, rituals, and institutions in which they, or their predecessors, had invested with rich resources of symbolic capital, was a dynamic which energised the formation of social ties among them and sustained the cohesion of their class as a community of prestige. The dynamic role of the interest in status, honour, prestige, and recognition in activating elite social interactions, institutions, and cohesion in colonial Singapore resembled in some respects the activating dynamic at the elite centres of traditional Balinese and Malay societies, as explained by Clifford Geertz<sup>318</sup> and Anthony Milner respectively. But the elite of colonial Singapore was a multiracial and culturally diverse group. While Anthony Milner has explained how the elites of the traditional cultural world could become Malay through assimilating themselves into the Malay culture,<sup>319</sup> the Asian and European elites of colonial Singapore were naturally each proud of their own distinctive cultural identities, and did not assimilate into a single unifying culture here. This fact highlights the importance of social connections and integration, rather than cultural assimilation and unity, as decisive factors in the cohesion

---

<sup>318</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*.

<sup>319</sup> Anthony Milner, *Kerajaan: Malay Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule*, pp. 11 and 89-90.

of the cosmopolitan elite class – a class which was a community of shared prestige, rather than a community of a shared culture. The prestige-enhancing interactions of Asian and European elites here transcended their cultural divisions and fostered the cohesion of their cosmopolitan social centre. This process offered the potential of linking together all elites, of all ethnic groups and races, into a community of prestige, not just those who shared a cultural identity or who did business together.

Although representations and imagery were certainly important in reinforcing the social reality of the symbolic capital invested in the status symbols which were shared and exchanged among the Asian and European elites, stress must be given to the importance of actions as well as perceptions in building and sustaining the elite class as a social entity. The multiracial community of prestige in colonial Singapore is defined for the purposes of this study not so much by whether or not the Asian and European members of the community imagined themselves to be the members of such a social group, but, rather, by the evidence of the social institutions and patterns of cooperative interactions which actually integrated them as a social group of elites, as well as the fact that Asian and European elites alike often possessed and consumed certain status symbols which gave them distinctive lifestyles.<sup>320</sup> The conclusion that a multiracial elite class or community of prestige existed in colonial Singapore does not depend on whether or not the Asian and European members of this class actually perceived their own social world and identity in this way in their own time. In fact, it would not matter to the conclusions of this study actually denied the existence of their class, as the existence of class divisions

---

<sup>320</sup> See: G. William Domhoff, *The Higher Circles*, pp. 75-76.

have sometimes been denied in other places.<sup>321</sup> The proof is in the evidence of the social interactions which made this elite class or community of prestige a living social reality throughout the colonial era, regardless of whether or not it was recognised or denied, named or not named at the time. However it was consciously perceived, it was real because it was inherent in the performances of the actors in the theatre of prestige.

### **Concluding Remarks**

There was an increasing elaboration institutional network over time, as the number of organisations grew over the years. Still, despite this development over time, the basic theme was one of continuity: throughout the history of colonial Singapore, Asian and European elites held leadership positions in various organisations, and took part with one another in public celebrations. The institutional mechanism of elite affirmation and display of social status imparted symbolic value and meaning to the institutional status symbols of the elites, and promoted social interaction, cooperation, and mutual recognition of elite status among the members of the multiracial elite class. Although this social structure became more complex and elaborate over time, its basic functions did not change – it enhanced the prestige of individual elites, and brought them together as an elite social class, year after year.

An exploration of the patterns of interactions and exchanges of symbolic capital among Asian and Europeans elites, as well as the institutional system which they created, and of how these elites cooperated in organising spectacular public celebrations and in creating public imagery, suggests certain conclusions about the overall nature of the

---

<sup>321</sup> See: David Cannadine, *Class in Britain*, pp. 2 and 96; and Domhoff, *The Higher Circles*, pp. 71-72. E. Digby Baltzell recalled that his friends regarded the discussion of social class as *effeminate*; see: E. Digby Baltzell, "Upper Class and Elites," in: E. Digby Baltzell, *The Protestant Establishment Revisited*, p. 27; and: Howard G. Schneiderman's Introduction to Baltzell's *The Protestant Establishment Revisited*, p. xvi.

society of colonial Singapore. This society conformed to neither a conflict model, nor to a consensus model.<sup>322</sup> Instead, it was characterised by elite-level interracial organisation and cooperation, and by mass compliance with elite authority. While the masses did not *always* comply with the wishes of the elites – and even the elites did not *always* agree amongst themselves – such elements of non-compliance and disagreement were insufficient to contradict the overall social reality of elite cooperation and mass compliance.

---

<sup>322</sup> On the conflict and consensus models, see: Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*, pp. xi-xiii, and xxxviii. See also: Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*, pp. 14-17, 22-23, and 442; and: Dennis H. Wrong, *The Problem of Order: What Unites and Divides Society*, pp. 205-212.



## **Conclusions and Implications**

This study of the social interaction of Asian and European elites in a colonial setting challenges the Furnivallian view of the racially segregated and ethnically compartmentalised<sup>1</sup> colonial plural society; moreover, this study questions the long tradition of seeing societies or populations as basically divided into two or more groups engaged in power relationships characterised by conflict, struggle, and resistance.<sup>2</sup> An appreciation of the degree of cooperation among Asian and European elites suggests that it would be incorrect to see colonial society here as simplistically characterised by a bifurcation along racial lines into a dichotomy of Europeans versus Asians, or colonisers versus the colonised.<sup>3</sup> In colonial Singapore, the Asian immigrants were just as much colonists as the Europeans, and resourceful and ambitious Asian elites were just as closely involved and responsible for the development of Singapore as European elites, since the colonial economic and political system here was a joint enterprise characterised by partnership between Asian and European elites who belonged to a socially-cohesive elite class and who cooperated closely as they colonised Singapore together. Clearly, it would be incorrect to view the society of colonial Singapore as having been divided into European *settlers*, *colonialists*,<sup>4</sup> or *colonists*<sup>5</sup> on one side, and on the other side a

---

<sup>1</sup> Regarding the problem of compartmentalisation and the importance of multiethnic interactions in colonial-era Malaya, see: Wu Xiao An, *Chinese Business in the Making of a Malay State, 1882-1941: Kedah and Penang*, pp. 4, 6, 10, 181-182, and 187.

<sup>2</sup> See the discussion of *conflict theory* versus a consensus-oriented functionalism, in: Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*, *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> Regarding *the colonisers* and *the colonised*, see: Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, pp. 15-17, and: Ronald J. Horvath, "In Search of a Theory of Urbanization: Notes on the Colonial City," *The East Lakes Geographer*, Volume 5 (December 1969), pp. 69-82, especially pp. 73 and 76. See also Brenda Yeoh's discussion of the work of Ronald J. Horvath, in: Yeoh, *Contesting Space*, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Chan Kwok Bun and Claire Chiang See Ngoh employed the term *colonialists*, with regard to colonial Singapore, in a way which suggests that they believed that this term applied only to the Europeans here, and not to the Chinese. See: Chan Kwok Bun and Claire Chiang See Ngoh, *Stepping Out: The Making of Chinese Entrepreneurs*, p. 33.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

*colonised* population composed of indigenous and native people, and (or) immigrants. In fact, virtually all – if not all – of the people here in the colonial era were either migrants, or the descendants of migrants who had arrived on this island no more than a few generations earlier.

Both the European minority in colonial Singapore and the Asian majority here were *alike* composed of migrants, settlers, colonists, and their descendants; the Chinese majority were migrants who were in no sense indigenous to this island, any more than the Europeans. For at least the first century of the history of the Settlement of Singapore – from 1819 to at least the 1920s – the bulk of the population was made up of people who came from other places, such as China, India, Sumatra, the Ottoman Empire, and Europe; it was only in the twentieth century that a locally-born majority appeared within the Chinese population. The 1947 census was the first census to show that the majority of the Chinese population of Singapore had been born in Singapore or Malaya; in the previous census, in 1931, only 35.6 percent of the Chinese population of this island was born here or elsewhere in Malaya.<sup>6</sup>

Among both the Asians and the Europeans who arrived here, there were settlers who made Singapore their new and permanent home, as well as other migrants who eventually returned to their homelands; therefore, terms such as *immigrant*, *settler*, and *sojourner* should not be applied exclusively to either the Asians or the Europeans here in the colonial era, any more than the terms *colonist*, *capitalist*, and *elite* – each of these

---

<sup>5</sup> For an example of the use of the term *colonist*, see: Chan Kwok Bun and Claire Chiang See Ngoh, *Stepping Out: The Making of Chinese Entrepreneurs*, p. 48 (quoting Ng Teow Yhee) and p. 345.

<sup>6</sup> M.V. Del Tufo, *Malaya Comprising the Federation of Malaya and the Colony of Singapore: A Report on the 1947 Census of Population*, table on p. 84.



## *Conclusions and Implications*

terms could be applied accurately to Asians as well as Europeans in Singapore.<sup>7</sup> Chinese and other Asian colonists deserve at least as much credit for building colonial Singapore as do the European empire-builders. The colonisation of Singapore was at least as much an Asian project (and especially a Chinese project) as it was European, even though it took place under the British flag.<sup>8</sup> Both the Asian and European ingredients in the development of Singapore were essential to its success, although certain accounts may seem to focus on just one or the other of these ingredients; in the colonial era, there may have been a tendency to focus on the European contribution, while in the post-colonial era, there may be a similar tendency to focus on the Asian contribution.<sup>9</sup>

It would be rather problematic to claim that any racial or ethnic group is indigenous to Singapore, or to divide the colonial-era population into the categories of *locals* and *foreigners*.<sup>10</sup> In fact, virtually all people living here in the colonial era – Chinese, Malays, Indians, Eurasians, Arabs, and *ang mohs* alike – were either immigrants or sojourners, or the descendants of immigrants who arrived here after the opening of the nineteenth century. In the colonial era, the percentage of foreign-born people (that is, people born outside of Malaya) was very high – for example, in 1921, 68 percent of the

---

<sup>7</sup> A Table found in a book entitled *Past Times: A Social History of Singapore* characterises the population of Singapore from 1819 to 1867 as having been made up of coolies and Europeans, with the coolies described as *immigrants* and the Europeans described as *expatriates*. A reader might assume that all Europeans in Singapore at that time were short-term residents, while all coolies were settlers. In fact, it seems likely that many of the coolies did not intend to settle permanently in Singapore, and were actually migrants or sojourners who planned to return to their native lands, while many of the Europeans in Singapore at that time were long-term residents. See: Alexius Pereira, “It’s Us Against Them: Sports in Singapore,” in: Chan Kwok Bun and Tong Chee Kiong, editors, *Past Times: A Social History of Singapore*, table on p. 147. Regarding *sojourners*, see: C.A. Vlieland, *British Malaya ... A Report on the 1931 Census*, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> See: Ernest C.T. Chew, “Founders and Builders of Early Colonial Singapore,” in: Irene Lim, editor, *Sketching the Straits: A Compilation of the Lecture Series on the Charles Dyce Collection*, pp. 23-31.

<sup>9</sup> See: Melanie Chew, *Leaders of Singapore*.

<sup>10</sup> For example, Chan Kwok Bun and Claire Chiang See Ngoh employed the terms *foreigners* and *colonialists*, with regard to colonial Singapore, in a way which suggests that they believed that these terms applied only to the Europeans here, and not to the Chinese. See: Chan Kwok Bun and Claire Chiang See Ngoh, *Stepping Out: The Making of Chinese Entrepreneurs*, pp. 32-33.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

population of Singapore was born outside of Malaya, and even as late as 1931 over 60 percent of the population was foreign-born.<sup>11</sup> Regarding the ethnic Chinese majority, 75 percent of the Chinese living in Singapore in 1921 were born outside of Malaya,<sup>12</sup> and almost all of these ethnic Chinese immigrants were born in China.<sup>13</sup> As to the Malay population of Singapore, the Superintendent of the 1931 Census described the Malay population of British Malaya (including Singapore) as having been descended from immigrants from Sumatra and other islands in this region.<sup>14</sup> Clearly, Singapore was then (as it still is today) an island of immigrants and the descendants of immigrants. It could be argued that no one race has a special claim to this island, or to indigenous status here; all Singaporeans born on this island – Chinese, Malays, Indians, and others alike – may assert equal claims to this island as their native land. The diverse racial and ethnic groups which make up the cosmopolitan population of Singapore are, despite their diversity, nevertheless alike in the sense of their shared immigrant origins. Everyone born on this island is descended from people who chose to make this their home. This was as true in the colonial era as it is today – in fact, throughout most of the colonial era, the immigrant character of the population was far more obvious, since so few of the people living here then were born here.

#### **Was Every Immigrant a Colonist?**

Colonial Singapore society was not divided into a dichotomy of colonists versus colonised people because, in fact, *everyone* in colonial Singapore who arrived here from somewhere else was, in a sense, a colonist. The fact that virtually everyone here – Asian

---

<sup>11</sup> C.A. Vlieland, *British Malaya ... A Report on the 1931 Census and on Certain Problems of Vital Statistics*, table p. 68.

<sup>12</sup> Vlieland, table on p. 69.

<sup>13</sup> Vlieland, p. 70, paragraph number 248.

<sup>14</sup> Vlieland, p. 71, paragraph number 251.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

and European, rich and poor alike – were colonists or the descendants of colonists may be difficult for some people to accept, since there may be a tendency to imagine that only Europeans could be colonists and that Asians in colonial settings were necessarily *colonised* or *indigenous* people. Yet, with regard to the case of colonial Singapore, the application of these terms to any ethnic group here is problematic. These Asian and European colonists enjoyed different shares in the profits or rewards of this colonisation, in terms of material profits as well as the rewards of honours, status, and prestige. Clearly, some people were far more privileged than others with regard to these profits and rewards, but the division between the more fortunate and the less fortunate was based on class position, rather than racial or ethnic identity – there were more fortunate and less fortunate individuals among the Asians as well as the Europeans; indeed, it seems that there were at least some poor Europeans in Singapore in the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> Contemporary observers asserted that most of the wealthy people in colonial Singapore were Chinese.<sup>16</sup> In addition to the rich Chinese, some Indian,<sup>17</sup> Arab,<sup>18</sup> and Jewish,<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Regarding European labourers in Singapore *circa* 1864, see: John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India*, pp. 281-285. See also the description of impoverished Australians and European sailors in Singapore in the 1860s, in: C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*, pp. 63-64.

<sup>16</sup> On the economic supremacy of the wealthy Chinese in Singapore, see: Minute by Governor Robert Fullerton, dated 24<sup>th</sup> August 1829, published as extract number 154 in: C.D. Cowan, editor, “Early Penang & the Rise of Singapore 1805-1832: Documents from the manuscript records of the East India Company...” in the *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. XXIII, Pt. II, March 1950, p. 192 (I am grateful to Clement Liew for kindly bringing this extract to my attention); Ashley Gibson, *The Malay Peninsula and Archipelago* (1928), p. 32; and: John H. MacCallum Scott, *Eastern Journey* (1939), p. 18.

<sup>17</sup> Leslie Netto, *Passage of Indians*; Hans-Dieter Evers and Jayarani Pavadarayan, “Religious Fervour and Economic Success,” in: K.S. Sandhu and A. Mani, editors, *Indian Communities in Southeast Asia*, pp. 847-865; Rajabali Jumabhoy, *Multiracial Singapore – On to the Nineties*. Regarding Moona Kadir Sultan, see: René Onraet, *Singapore – A Police Background*, pp. 8-11; and: *Malaya Tribune*, 9 June 1937, p. 20, R0005945, and: Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*, pp. 55 and 118.

<sup>18</sup> Regarding wealthy Arabs in colonial Singapore, see: J.E. Nathan, *The Census of British Malaya ... 1921*, p. 91, paragraph 339; Arnold Wright and H.A. Cartwright, editors, *Twentieth Century Impressions* (1908), p. 710; Sir Frederick A. Weld, “The Straits Settlements and British Malaya” (1884), in: Paul H. Kratoska, editor, *Honourable Intentions*, p. 48; John Drysdale, *Singapore: Struggle for Success*, p. xv; Ulrike Freitag, “Arab Merchants in Singapore,” and: William R. Roff, “Murder as an Aid to Social History” in: Huub de Jonge and Nico Kaptein, editors, *Transcending Borders*, pp. 109-142 and 91-108

## *Conclusions and Implications*

businessmen were also very wealthy,<sup>20</sup> and there were also prominent Armenian<sup>21</sup> and Parsi<sup>22</sup> businessmen in Singapore in the nineteenth century. Salim bin Talib, an Arab steamship-owner and landlord in Singapore in the early decades of the twentieth century, may have been the richest man in Singapore in the 1920s and 1930s, according to at least one scholar.<sup>23</sup> Sultan Abu Bakar of Johore, and his son, Sultan Ibrahim, were extremely wealthy,<sup>24</sup> and they were each very prominent in Singapore society, in the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century respectively. Besides these very wealthy Malay sultans who had palaces in Singapore, there were also some wealthy Malay private citizens.<sup>25</sup>

The Asian population of colonial Singapore was divided, not only into large categories, such as the Chinese and the Indians, but also into many narrower categories, along the lines of languages or dialects, places of origin, and religion. There were also important distinctions according to degrees of wealth and levels of education. Clearly,

---

respectively. See also: *Straits Times* 28 December 1899, p. 2, and 30 December 1899, p. 2, R0016462. See also: *Straits Times*, 10 February 1887, quoted in: Brenda Yeoh, *Contesting Space*, p. 59.

<sup>19</sup> Regarding Jewish residents of colonial Singapore, see: Eze Nathan, *The History of Jews in Singapore 1830-1945*; J.E. Nathan, *The Census of British Malaya ... 1921*, p. 91, paragraph 339; and: John Dill Ross, *The Capital of a Little Empire* (1898) p. 69. Regarding Sir Manasseh Meyer, see: *Straits Times*, 3 November 1922, p. 9, R0016597; Walter Makepeace, "Concerning Known Persons," in: Makepeace *et al.*, *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume Two, pp. 463-464; *British Malaya*, April 1929, p. 316; *Malaya Tribune*, 1 July 1930, p. 9, R0005882; *British Malaya*, August 1930, pp. 103-104; *Singapore Free Press*, 2 July 1930, p. 10, R0006210.

<sup>20</sup> Rene Onraet pointed out that many Asian businessmen enjoyed incomes three or more times that of high-ranking colonial government officials – Onraet, *Singapore – A Police Background*, p. 12.

<sup>21</sup> See: Nadia H. Wright, *Respected Citizens: The History of Armenians in Singapore and Malaysia*; Charles Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition*, (1852), quoted in: John Bastin, *Travellers' Singapore*, p. 52; C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*, p. 14; C.M. Turnbull, *Dateline Singapore*, pp. 10-15; and: Ilsa Sharp, *There is Only One Raffles*, pp. 22-28.

<sup>22</sup> Charles Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition* (1852), quoted in: John Bastin, *Travellers' Singapore*, p. 52; jAlfred Russel Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago*, p. 32; John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions* (1865) p. 135; and: C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*, p. 52.

<sup>23</sup> Ulrike Freitag, "Arab Merchants in Singapore," in: Huub de Jonge and Nico Kaptein, editors, *Transcending Borders*, p. 117.

<sup>24</sup> See the discussion of the wealth of Sultan Ibrahim in: Eunice Thio, *British Policy in The Malay Peninsula 1880-1910 Volume I The Southern and Central States*, pp. 247-248.

<sup>25</sup> Regarding wealthy Malays, see, for example: *Straits Times*, 21 October 1925, p. 9; 31 October 1925, p. 9; 10 July 1906, p. 5; 11 July 1906, p. 5; 13 July 1906, p. 5.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

this does not conform to any imaginary picture of Singapore society characterised by large masses of Asians united in struggle against, and resistance to, the colonial authorities. Moreover, wealthy Chinese businessmen probably had good reason to want to encourage Chinese workers in Singapore to focus on their different dialect-group identities rather than their shared working-class identity; indeed, these Chinese business elites likely had good reason to want to publicly identify themselves with the Chinese masses, by emphasising their roles as community leaders of dialect-group or clan organisations who represented the interests of the Chinese masses to the colonial government – if the Chinese workers had put aside their dialect-group differences and focused on their shared working-class interests and frustrations or grievances in opposition to the elite class, the Chinese elites would have been in as much trouble as the European elites. The same could, presumably, be said of the wealthy elites of all Asian ethnic groups.

Likewise, in the closing phase of the colonial era in the 1950s, Chinese elites in Singapore would understandably have had good reason to wish to publicly identify themselves with nationalism and the popular spirit of *Merdeka* or Malayan national independence, no matter how closely they had cooperated with European colonial officials and businessmen, or how much these leading Asians had benefited from their cooperation with Europeans in terms of both material rewards and public honours.<sup>26</sup> It was only natural for elites to wish to adapt themselves to changes in the political and symbolic spheres, by embracing the new spirit of nationalism and distancing themselves from their formerly close ties with the colonial system. Their colonial connections, and their record of enjoying rich economic and symbolic rewards while cooperating with

---

<sup>26</sup> See: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, p. xxvii.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

European colonial elites, made them vulnerable to accusations of collaboration, unless they made a point of expressing their ardent support for the nationalist spirit which prevailed after World War Two. The willingness and ability of Asian elites to successfully adapt to the newly ascendant ideologies and symbols of nationalism allowed established elites to sustain their social position, despite the changes going on around them; in other words, their ability to accept certain types of *change* in the political and symbolic realms, likely allowed them to maintain *continuity* in the areas of prestige and status, which were so deeply important to them.

### **Elite Class Identity Transcended Racial Distinctions**

Colonial Singapore society cannot be viewed simply as a population divided into two categories or groups – the Asians and the Europeans – who engaged each other in constant struggle and resistance, confrontation and compromise. It would not be difficult to depict the past as a drama of conflict, but the social reality was more complicated. These concepts of struggle, resistance, and compromise assume that there were essential differences of interests between the parties involved. However, at the apex of the multiracial society, Asian and European elites generally shared the same interests in wealth and prestige.<sup>27</sup> Colonial society here was not organised as a grouping of Asians

---

<sup>27</sup> On the human need for social recognition, status, or prestige, see: Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*, pp. 37-38; William J. Goode, *The Celebration of Heroes: Prestige as a Social Control System*, p. vii; and: Robert W. Fuller, *Somebodies and Nobodies: Overcoming the Abuse of Rank*, pp. 46, 48, 49, and 56. On the psychological need for prestige in the value system of Chinese merchants in colonial Singapore, and the relationship between their display of wealth (including mansions and gardens) to their acquisition of prestige, see: Yen Ching-hwang, "Ch'ing's Sale of Honours and the Chinese Leadership in Singapore and Malaya (1877-1912)," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Volume 1, Number 2 (September 1970), pp. 26-32. Regarding perceptions of honour and prestige among Westerners, see: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, esp. Chapters 10, 11, 13, and 17, pp. 114-124, 143, and 175; see also: John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia*, pp. 77, 170, 171-172, 226, and 227. Regarding *nama*, see: Anthony Milner, *Kerajaan: Malay Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule*, especially pp. xvi, 104, 105, and 106. Regarding *face* or *mien-tzu* (also spelled *mianzi*), see, for example: P. Christopher Earley,

### *Conclusions and Implications*

on one side and a grouping of Europeans on the other. Instead, Asians and Europeans alike were organised on an ethnic or sub-ethnic basis, with overarching social connections and patterns of interaction at the elite level.

This is not to say that there was no significant degree of conflict in colonial Singapore. Of course, there were outbreaks of disorder from time to time, and colonial authorities sometimes encountered difficulties in the enforcement of certain laws. Moreover, colonial Singapore naturally experienced the variety and frequency of common criminal activities which would be expected in a city of its size. However, this must not blind us to the fact that the overall, everyday reality of colonial Singapore society was one of relative order and stability, with the masses providing the labour, rent, and revenue (through purchase of opium and spirits) to the Asian and European elites, day in and day out. The coolie labourers were evidently far more inclined to smother their sorrows in clouds of opium smoke, than to rise up in resistance and rebellion against the wealthy Chinese *towkays* who exploited their labour, or the colonial system which protected and incorporated the towkays. While instances of resistance of the masses towards the regulations enacted by the colonial administration and the multiracial elites should be acknowledged, such resistance must not be misinterpreted as the central dynamic around which colonial society revolved – it must not be foregrounded in such a way that it overshadows or obscures the orderly daily reality, or the fact that the Asian and European elites were generally highly successful in achieving their goals and acquiring prestige and wealth through their close cooperation over the years, in an

---

*Face, Harmony, and Social Structure: An Analysis of Organizational Behaviour across Cultures*, pp. 36-38, 42-79, and 212-213.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

environment generally characterised by stability and order which was highly conducive to the success of these elites.

While there was, of course, a certain element of conflict and resistance over time in Singapore in the colonial era, this theme should not be overestimated. The most important dynamic was, instead, that the Asian and European members of the multiracial elite class were generally successful in achieving their goals through cooperation, partnership, and joint enterprise with one another at the elite level. Overall, elites of all races likely got what they wanted most of the time, and most of these wealthy people in colonial Singapore were apparently Asians.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the most important distinction in colonial Singapore society was not the distinction between Asians and Europeans, but rather the distinction between multiracial elites on the one hand, who held economic and political power, and on the other hand, the masses who earned their living through manual labour. The distinction between wealthy people versus the dock workers,

---

<sup>28</sup> Regarding accounts of the wealthy Chinese and other wealthy Asians, see: Minute by Governor Robert Fullerton, dated 24<sup>th</sup> August 1829, published as extract number 154 in: C.D. Cowan, editor, "Early Penang & the Rise of Singapore 1805-1832: Documents from the manuscript records of the East India Company..." in the *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. XXIII, Pt. II, March 1950, p. 192 (I am grateful to Clement Liew for kindly bringing this extract to my attention); *Singapore Chronicle*, 1 July 1830, 1 July 1830, p. 3, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0009222; John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p. 135; Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago*, pp. 32 and 33; John Thomson, *The Straits of Malacca*, p. 64; Isabella L. Bird, *The Golden Chersonese and the Way Thither*, pp. 115 and 116; Sir Frederick A. Weld, "The Straits Settlements and British Malaya," in: Paul H. Kratoska, editor, *Honourable Intentions*, p. 48; *Straits Times* 14 January 1885, p. 2, and 16 May 1885, p. 2, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016433; T.J. Keaughran, *Picturesque and Busy Singapore*, Singapore National Library microfilm NL 5829, p. 19; Henry Norman, *The Peoples and Politics of The Far East*, pp. 41-42; John Dill Ross, *The Capital of a Little Empire*, National Library of Singapore Microfilm reel NL 5829, p. 69; Arnold Wright and Thomas H. Reid, *The Malay Peninsula: A Record of British Progress in the Middle East*, pp. 221 and 227; W. Feldwick, editor-in-chief, *Present Day Impressions of the Far East and Prominent and Progressive Chinese at Home and Abroad*, p. 837; Rev. W.T. Cherry, *Geography of British Malaya and the Malay Archipelago*, p. 11; Charlotte Cameron, *Wanderings in South-Eastern Seas*, pp. 32-34 and 46; J.E. Nathan, *The Census of British Malaya ... 1921*, p. 91, and: C.A. Vlieland, *British Malaya ... A Report on the 1931 Census*, p. 87 (regarding wealthy Arabs and Jews); Margaret C. Wilson, *Malaya: The Land of Enchantment*, p. 105; John H. MacCallum Scott, *Eastern Journey*, pp. 17-18; René Onraet, *Singapore – A Police Background*, p. 12; Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, p. 145; and: C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*, pp. 38-40 and 113.



### *Conclusions and Implications*

rickshaw pullers, and sailors, was as great a distinction whether the wealthy individual in question was a Chinese *towkay*, an Arab landlord, an Indian *chettiar* money-lender, or a European *tuan besar*. Of course, it was possible that, once in a while, the distinction between the working class and the elite class was transcended and overcome by particularly enterprising and fortunate individuals, who managed to rise from the working class to the elite class, through personal industry, thrift, education, good fortune, or through marriage to a wealthy man's daughter; presumably, every Chinese hawker, and likewise every European clerk and every mariner who sailed before the mast, could dream of one day becoming a wealthy owner of godowns, steamships, and shophouses, however unlikely and remote were the odds against these dreams ever actually being realised.<sup>29</sup>

The daily reality of these Asian and European working-class people in colonial Singapore – the Asian dock workers and rickshaw pullers and the Western sailors<sup>30</sup> – hardly conformed to an image of constant struggle and resistance. Overall, the normal, everyday response of the masses to the authority of the multiracial elite was apparently characterised more by acceptance, obedience, and compliance, than by struggle or resistance. Day after day, the workers paid their rents, performed manual labour, and purchased opium and spirits. Ships were loaded and unloaded, and rickshaws were pulled through the streets, day in and day out. The rare instances of open defiance of

---

<sup>29</sup> Regarding rags-to-riches stories, see, for example, the references to the following self-made men in Sir Ong Siang Song's book *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*: Tan Tock Seng on p. 66, Foo Teng Quee on p. 96, Khoo Cheng Tiong on pp. 100-101, Gan Eng Seng on p. 273, Wong Ah Shak on p. 288, Teo Hoo Lye on p. 350, Ng Sing Phang on p. 424, and Loke Yew on p. 540. See also: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power*, p. 7. Regarding European dreams of success through personal achievement, the famous story of Raffles may be seen as an example of how the story of one man's rise from obscurity to greatness in the East was made known to the public, perhaps inspiring emulation.

<sup>30</sup> See the mention of unemployed Western sailors in colonial Singapore, in: C.M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements 1826-67*, pp. 221-222, and: John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India* (1865), pp. 281-284.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

authority on the part of certain sections of the general population, such as the Verandah Riots, were exceptional events, which were outnumbered by the frequent mass expressions of public loyalty to the Empire and its colonial system.<sup>31</sup> This does not mean that all of the Asian workers necessarily approved of the colonial system, and much less that they were enthusiastic supporters of that system; but it does indicate that they chose to accept the colonial system as they found it, and to play by its rules, in order to earn a living. Since the masses participated in Imperial patriotic events with apparent willingness and of their own free will, such mass expressions of acceptance of authority conferred legitimacy in the eyes of the public on the status of Asian and European elites, on the authority and prestige of their institutions, and on the pre-eminence of their multiracial elite class in colonial society.

#### **Elite Cooperation and Mass Compliance**

Generally speaking, mass acceptance of elite authority and status, which meant mass compliance with the colonial system, was the order of the day in Singapore in the colonial era. It is not the point here to romanticise mass acceptance of elite authority, nor to argue that such mass acceptance is necessarily a good thing. It is not the purpose of this study to judge this colonial reality – neither to blame, nor to praise or excuse it – but, rather, to describe and explain it, and to think outside the conventional box, with an emphasis on aspects of this reality which are not generally highlighted in writings on the colonial era – especially the integration and cohesion of the cosmopolitan elite class and the crucial importance and role of the creation and exchange of symbolic capital in

---

<sup>31</sup> Compare with: Yong Mun Cheong, “Some Thoughts on Modernization and Race Relations in the Political History of Singapore,” in: Yong Mun Cheong, editor, *Asian Traditions and Modernization: Perspectives from Singapore*, p. 70. See also: John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India*, pp. 256-258.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

fostering the solidarity and social capital of this multiracial elite class. Anyway, it should be obvious to everyone by the early twenty-first century that inequality is inherent in all societies, be they capitalist or communist, traditional or modern, agricultural or industrialised, colonial or postcolonial, Asian or European, past or present.<sup>32</sup> Whether this inequality is good or bad is not for this study to judge. Instead, this study challenges any tendency in some accounts to assume that the colonial society was mainly about racial conflict, struggle, and resistance;<sup>33</sup> instead, this analysis asserts that the colonial society here was characterised most of the time by relatively orderly and stable cooperation among the different races which lived here, which involved relationships of partnership and joint-enterprise between Asian and European elites in the colonial economy and government, and the acceptance by the labouring masses of the colonial social order (including elite authority and status, and the working conditions and wage scales encountered by the workers). Orderly cooperation, elite partnership, and mass

---

<sup>32</sup> Regarding the ubiquity of elites and inequality in societies, see: E. Digby Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen*, pp. 3-4; Tom Bottomore, *Elites and Society*, pp. 3, 5, and 10; Vilfredo Pareto, "The Treatise on General Sociology," in: Keith Grint, editor, *Leadership*, pp. 70-81; Robert Michels, *Political Parties*, pp. 377, 383, and 390; and: Gaetano Mosca, "The Ruling Class," in: David B. Grusky, editor, *Social Stratification*, pp. 195-201.

<sup>33</sup> Regarding the tendency of some accounts to emphasise the theme of *conflict* in societies, see: Bronwen Douglas, "Conflict and Alliance in a Colonial Context: Case Studies in New Caledonia 1853-1870," *The Journal of Pacific History*, Volume XV, Part 1, January 1980, pp. 21 and 22; Frederick Cooper, "Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History," *The American Historical Review*, Volume 99, Number 5 (December 1994), pp. 1516-1545; G. Balandier, "The Colonial Situation: A Theoretical Approach," in: Immanuel Wallerstein, editor, *Social Change: The Colonial Situation*, pp. 34-61; Edward Shils, "The Integration of Society," in: Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*, p. 83; David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*, pp. 125-126; John M. Carroll, *Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong*, pp. 11 and 12; Jon Goss, review of *Contesting Space* by Brenda S.A. Yeoh, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 89, No. 1 (Mar. 1999), pp. 187-189; Yong Mun Cheong, "Some Thoughts on Modernization and Race Relations in the Political History of Singapore," in: Yong Mun Cheong, editor, *Asian Traditions and Modernization: Perspectives from Singapore*, p. 70; and: Lai Ah Eng, *Meanings of Multiethnicity: A Case-study of Ethnicity and Ethnic Relations in Singapore*, p. 10. See also the discussion of *conflict theory* versus a consensus-oriented functionalism, in: Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*, *passim*.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

acceptance characterised the daily reality most of the time, despite occasional incidents of resistance which, if anything, were the exceptions which proved the rule.<sup>34</sup>

Colonial Singapore clearly provided a social and political environment which suited the interests of Asian and European elites alike to achieve success in terms of wealth and status. Leading British elites, including Sir Hugh Clifford,<sup>35</sup> Sir Frank Swettenham,<sup>36</sup> and Sir Richard Winstedt,<sup>37</sup> praised Chinese immigrants to Singapore and Malaya for being law-abiding and good citizens; the fact that such opinions were publicly expressed and published in the colonial era challenges any notion that the relations between Europeans and Chinese here were characterised by conflict, struggle, and resistance.<sup>38</sup> For every individual who rebelled or struggled against the legal or social structure, it is evident that there were many more who obeyed the rules and avoided legal and social sanctions. As to what the immigrant workers themselves may have thought about the social reality here, it must be borne in mind that their terms of reference for the expectations which they brought to Singapore, and the judgements which they made of this place, must have been based on the conditions of their homelands in China, India, or

---

<sup>34</sup> Compare with: Yong Mun Cheong, "Some Thoughts on Modernization and Race Relations in the Political History of Singapore," in: Yong Mun Cheong, editor, *Asian Traditions and Modernization: Perspectives from Singapore*, p. 70. See also: John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India*, pp. 256-258.

<sup>35</sup> Hugh Clifford, "A Lesson from the Malay States." *The Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 84, No. 505 (November 1899), p. 599.

<sup>36</sup> Sir Frank Swettenham, *British Malaya*, p. 232.

<sup>37</sup> R.O. Winstedt, *Malaya: The Straits Settlements and the Federated and Unfederated Malay States* (1923), p. 121.

<sup>38</sup> Regarding the law-abiding nature or good-citizenship of Chinese in Singapore, see also: John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions* (1865), p. 145; J.D. Vaughan, *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese of the Straits Settlements* (originally published in 1879, republished in 1985), pp. 41 and 43; George C. Wray, Protector of Chinese, quoted in Henry Norman, *The Peoples and Politics of The Far East* (1901), p. 42; the speech of Lord Dalhousie quoted in the *Singapore Free Press*, 22 February 1850, p. 4, NUS microfilm reel R0006016; and a letter from a Straits Chinese published in the *Straits Times*, 19 June 1900, p. 2, R0016463. See also the allusions to interracial goodwill, understanding, and harmony in a speech of C.W. Darbishire, Legislative Councillor and Chairman of the Singapore Chamber of Commerce, in June 1915, quoted by Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 197; and Governor Sir Arthur Young's praise of the loyalty of domestic servants during the Sepoy mutiny in 1915, quoted by Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 483.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

elsewhere when they were growing up. The living conditions and wages they found when they arrived in Singapore may well have seemed relatively satisfactory to them, based on their past experiences; this is indicated by the fact that immigrants continued to vote with their feet by migrating to Singapore, flocking here in droves throughout the colonial period.<sup>39</sup> Presumably, if they had found conditions here to be relatively unacceptable, the news would have quickly got around to their compatriots back home, and the flow of immigrants would have swiftly dwindled.

While the working conditions, wages, and living quarters of immigrant workers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries may seem unacceptable to us today, in the twenty-first century, we must bear in mind that these immigrants had terms of reference which were very different from ours. The harshness of the conditions they faced in Singapore indicates that the conditions they left behind in their homelands must have been truly wretched. Yet, however much the immigrants may have found conditions here to be acceptable or even relatively satisfactory by their standards, it was only reasonable that the children and grandchildren of immigrants, born and raised in Singapore, would develop much higher expectations of living and working conditions and wages. This would become an important issue from the late 1940s onwards, which saw the development of a large segment within the population of Singapore, made up of Singaporeans who had been born and raised in Singapore or its Malayan hinterland, rather than in China or elsewhere. In 1947, 59.9 percent of the Chinese inhabitants of Singapore had been born in Malaya (including Singapore), while the figures for 1921 and

---

<sup>39</sup> On Asian migrants voting with their feet, see: Rhoads Murphey, "On the Evolution of the Port City," in *Brides of the Sea: Port Cities of Asia from the 16<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, edited by Frank Broeze, p. 238; and: Ian Copland, *The Burden of Empire: Perspectives on Imperialism and Colonialism*, p. 86.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

1931 were 25.1 percent and 35.6 percent respectively.<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, 36.3 percent of the Indian inhabitants of Singapore in 1947 were born in Malaya, while the figures for 1921 and 1931 were 17.1 percent and 17.7 percent respectively.<sup>41</sup> In the closing years of its colonial era, Singapore shifted from its long-established role as a city of immigrants, to become a city of the sons and daughters – and grandsons and granddaughters – of immigrants. Singapore became a city of Singaporeans, who would increasingly look forward to spending their lives and raising their families here in Singapore, rather than in China or elsewhere.

Such struggles, resistances, and compromises as occurred tended to reflect such ethnic or sub-ethnic divisions, such as conflicts between Hokkiens and Teochews. Even the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce, the overarching organisation of the Chinese community founded in 1906, actually perpetuated the division of the masses and leadership of the population along dialect-group lines, in a sort of United Nations of dialect groups linked together at the elite level in the Committee of the Chamber. Such struggle and resistance as occurred at the elite level – for example, the military contribution question in the late nineteenth century, tended to involve Asian and European elites together, in cooperation to promote their shared interests by opposing governmental policy. The close social and institutional networks among Asian and European elites integrated them into a cohesive multiracial elite class as they worked together to achieve their mutual economic and political goals, as well as their shared interests in public honours and prestige.

---

<sup>40</sup> M.V. Del Tufo, *Malaya Comprising the Federation of Malaya and the Colony of Singapore: A Report on the 1947 Census of Population*, table on p. 84.

<sup>41</sup> M.V. Del Tufo, *Malaya Comprising the Federation of Malaya and the Colony of Singapore: A Report on the 1947 Census of Population*, table on p. 85.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

To imagine that the Chinese masses substantially resisted governmental authority or business interests in colonial Singapore would be as mistaken as it would be to assert that the wealthy Chinese *towkays* who resided in sumptuous villas in the most fashionable suburbs were somehow oppressed by colonialism, or that they had reason to oppose the colonial system. In fact, it is evident that the Chinese workers mainly accepted the social, political, and economic realities, laboured obediently most of the time, paid their rent and bought opium, while the wealthy local Chinese businessmen really had every reason to cooperate with and support the colonial authorities for the sake of their own financial interests<sup>42</sup> – indeed, at least some Chinese businessmen profited from selling opium to the workers,<sup>43</sup> and many wealthy Asians owned rental properties where the workers lived.<sup>44</sup> So much for any imaginary visions of colonial Singapore as *mainly* an arena of *racial* struggle. Rich Asians found colonialism in Singapore to be anything but oppressive. For wealthy Chinese and other rich Asians here, the colonial era was a veritable golden age, as they revelled in an aristocratic lifestyle of wealth, privilege, and prestige, which may have been beyond what they could have achieved in their ancestral homelands. Colonial Singapore and its Malayan hinterland was a land of bountiful opportunities for Asian businessmen,<sup>45</sup> just as much as it was for European businessmen. Rich Asians had no more reason to complain about or to resist the colonial

---

<sup>42</sup> See: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, p. 18.

<sup>43</sup> On the connections between opium and the Chinese business elite in colonial-era Singapore and Malaya, see: Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, p. 229 and 233; Carl A. Trocki, *Opium and Empire: Chinese Society in Colonial Singapore, 1800 – 1910*, p. 237; Sir Frank Swettenham, *British Malaya: An Account of the Origin and Progress of British Influence in Malaya* (Seventh Impression 1955), p. 255; K.G. Tregonning, *Straits Tin*, pp. 26-28; John Butcher, “Loke Yew”, in: John Butcher and Howard Dick, editors, *The Rise and Fall of Revenue Farming: Business Elites and the Emergence of the Modern State in Southeast Asia*, pp. 255-260.

<sup>44</sup> Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, p. 145.

<sup>45</sup> Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, p. 3. See also: John Butcher, “Loke Yew”, in: John Butcher and Howard Dick, editors, *The Rise and Fall of Revenue Farming: Business Elites and the Emergence of the Modern State in Southeast Asia*, pp. 255-260.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

system here,<sup>46</sup> than did their neighbours and partners in the colonial economic sphere, the European merchants and capitalists.

### **Asian Participation was Crucial**

Colonialism in Singapore – and, indeed, in Asia as a whole – could not have happened or lasted as long as it did without the participation of Asians, and most especially the avid cooperation of enterprising Asian businessmen and other Asian elites.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, colonialism cannot be understood without putting the role of Asian elites at centre stage in the analysis of any colonial setting in Asia, including Singapore. Thus, this study of social history in colonial Singapore has focused on putting Asian elites into the foreground of colonial society history, not as contestants or resisters, but as elite partners in a joint enterprise – a concept which becomes more clear through the appreciation of how the Asian and European elites here were socially integrated into an elite class not only economically, but also by means of the creation and exchange of symbolic capital in institutional and ritual settings.

Asian and European elites in colonial Singapore perceived the advantages they would gain by sticking together as a multiracial elite class – they all had a great deal to gain through cooperation in business, in government, and in the sharing of symbolic capital which was integral to their social cohesion and status. It was at the elite level that the society of colonial Singapore achieved some sense of unity, at least to some degree, though the formation of elite-level social ties and networks or social capital; and it was

---

<sup>46</sup> See: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, p. 18.

<sup>47</sup> See: Ronald Robinson, “Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration.” In: Roger Owen and Bob Sutcliffe, editors. *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism*. London: Longman Group Limited, 1972, pp. 117-142. See also: Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, pp. 287-288.



## *Conclusions and Implications*

largely through the cooperation of Asian and European elites in creating, sharing, and exchanging symbolic capital that the social capital of the multiracial elite class took shape as a medium or matrix of social connections formed among multiracial elites.

The focus of this study on elite-level cooperation and social integration provides a conceptual alternative to what might be the more conventional or fashionable approach to social history, which privileges conflict and struggle, whether conflict between classes or conflict between races.<sup>48</sup> Singapore society in the colonial era was generally characterised by neither class conflict nor race conflict. The instances of conflict which did occur from time to time were the exceptions that proved the rule; to focus on the exceptional instances, such as riots, might lead towards a skewed depiction of colonial society.<sup>49</sup> In fact, the instances of conflict were remarkably few and rare,<sup>50</sup> considering the diversity of races, cultures, and religions represented among the populace, the great inequalities in the distribution of wealth and power, and the limited amount of police and

---

<sup>48</sup> Regarding the tendency of some accounts to emphasise the theme of *conflict* in societies, see: Bronwen Douglas, "Conflict and Alliance in a Colonial Context: Case Studies in New Caledonia 1853-1870," *The Journal of Pacific History*, Volume XV, Part 1, January 1980, pp. 21 and 22; Frederick Cooper, "Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History," *The American Historical Review*, Volume 99, Number 5 (December 1994), pp. 1516-1545; G. Balandier, "The Colonial Situation: A Theoretical Approach," in: Immanuel Wallerstein, editor, *Social Change: The Colonial Situation*, pp. 34-61; Edward Shils, "The Integration of Society," in: Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*, p. 83; David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*, pp. 125-126; John M. Carroll, *Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong*, pp. 11 and 12; Jon Goss, review of *Contesting Space* by Brenda S.A. Yeoh, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 89, No. 1 (Mar. 1999), pp. 187-189; Yong Mun Cheong, "Some Thoughts on Modernization and Race Relations in the Political History of Singapore," in: Yong Mun Cheong, editor, *Asian Traditions and Modernization: Perspectives from Singapore*, p. 70; and: Lai Ah Eng, *Meanings of Multiethnicity: A Case-study of Ethnicity and Ethnic Relations in Singapore*, p. 10. See also the discussion of *conflict theory* versus a consensus-oriented functionalism, in: Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*, *passim*.

<sup>49</sup> See: Yong Mun Cheong, "Some Thoughts on Modernization and Race Relations in the Political History of Singapore," in: Yong Mun Cheong, editor, *Asian Traditions and Modernization: Perspectives from Singapore*, p. 70.

<sup>50</sup> See: John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India*, pp. 256-258.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

military power available to local authorities for the first century of the existence of the Settlement of Singapore – that is, up to the 1920s.<sup>51</sup>

This analysis of the social history of colonial Singapore rejects a Marxian interpretation, not only by rejecting the notion that class conflict was the main theme of social history here, but also by rejecting the notion that historical developments will ever lead to some sort of a socialist egalitarian paradise, without class distinctions or inequalities. It seems that it is natural for human beings to be unequal according to various scales of evaluation – for example, athletic ability, intelligence, physical strength, physical attractiveness, and so on. The human race is given richness by the variety of qualities, talents, and abilities found in different individuals; it would be a tragedy if all of humanity consisted of identical clones. Human nature being what it is, it should be no surprise that social history reveals a great deal of continuity in social structures over time.

### **Symbolic Rewards as Goals**

While many people desire equality of opportunity so that they may be given the chance to achieve social mobility and economic success, it does not follow that people therefore desire the abolition of distinctions and privileges – on the contrary, many (if not all) people *like* the fact that there are distinctions, and want to maintain or improve their position relative to others. The ranking of individuals in certain social situations is natural and useful; it is only the abuse of rank which is a problem, as Robert Fuller has explained.<sup>52</sup> Thus, a hypothetical egalitarian society without classes could not possibly be a paradise, because it would frustrate the ambitions of so many people who desire to

---

<sup>51</sup> Regarding the limitations of military and police power in Singapore in the nineteenth century, see: Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, pp. 36, 38, and 50-53. See also the remarks in: John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India* (1865), pp. 256-257.

<sup>52</sup> Robert W. Fuller, *Somebodies and Nobodies: Overcoming the Abuse of Rank*.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

gain recognition, and to preserve or enhance their social and economic standing relative to others. Moreover, while many people enjoy having distinctions which set them apart from others, and some people desire positions of leadership or command, there are also many who want to be followers, which means that they are willing to recognise the superior rank of their leaders.

Symbolic rewards are at least as important as economic rewards in motivating behaviour; in the same way that productivity would suffer if everyone was paid the same salary regardless of the nature and quality of their work, so too would productivity likely decline if individuals were not given opportunities to distinguish themselves from others in various ways through their achievements. Even communist regimes employed extensive systems of formal honours, to confer recognition on citizens whose accomplishments were deemed meritorious according to communist ideology.<sup>53</sup> Of course, human beings always seem to find ways to rank themselves in all social settings, including the societies of inmates in prisons; social ranking requires no money or material goods of any kind – only the presence of other people. Anytime individuals find themselves grouped together, they may be expected to begin forming a social structure or pecking-order amongst themselves, including connections and rankings, or social and symbolic capital.

Many people seem to want to belong to hierarchies, so long as they believe that will be placed above the lowest ranks in their hierarchies. The striving for position and status symbols is familiar in many (if not every) society; for example, in Singapore today, this takes the form of *kiasu* behaviour and the interest in the *five Cs*, to use two terms

---

<sup>53</sup> Regarding communist honours, see: Philomena Guillebaud, “The Role of Honorary Awards in the Soviet Economic System,” *American Slavic and East European Review*, Volume 12, Number 4 (December 1953), pp. 486-505. See also the East German awards ceremony depicted in the film *Good Bye Lenin!*

### *Conclusions and Implications*

which are familiar to contemporary Singaporeans. These are the Singaporean terms for status-oriented behaviour, which are apparently endemic to the human species. This sort of social striving does not necessarily lead to social upheaval; on the contrary, it can actually contribute to the continuity of the social *status quo*, the structure which provides people with the status scale which they use to measure their success. The more they strive, the more time and energy they invest in working to enhance their status, the greater their stake in the *status quo*. There is every reason to believe that, so long as human beings are human, economic and social inequalities will continue to characterise all societies everywhere. Therefore, social history will likely always be at least as much about continuity as it will be about change.

This exploration of the role of Asian elites in colonial social history suggests that Asian elites had every reason to support the colonial class structure, with all its hierarchical distinctions, since these Asian elites enjoyed the benefits of this system, and thus it was clearly in their interest for this system to continue. Any tendency to imagine that Asians were merely colonised subjects or victims of colonialism, overlooks the fact that many Asians, or at least elite Asian businessmen and professionals, were active, willing, enthusiastic, and successful participants in colonialism, who made colonialism work for themselves; they and their European partners depended upon one another to sustain colonialism, as a joint enterprise among Asian and European elites. It is important to avoid imposing post-colonial or nationalistic standards back onto the colonial past in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; this cooperation was not a matter of *indigenous* Asian elites working with *foreign* colonial rulers; rather, the Asian and European business and administrative elites in colonial Singapore were, in a many

### *Conclusions and Implications*

cases, foreigners who thought of some other place as their ancestral homeland, whether that place was in China, India, the Arabian peninsula, or Europe – or Malacca, in the case of the Peranakan Chinese. There was no nationalistic reason for them to feel that there was anything wrong about working together, and, indeed, many Chinese elites in Singapore combined loyalty to the British Empire with Chinese patriotism.<sup>54</sup> This is illustrated in the photograph of Chinese elites in Singapore wearing their honorary mandarin robes at the unveiling of the statue of Queen Victoria at Government House in 1889, a statue which they presented in honour of the Queen's Golden Jubilee.<sup>55</sup> It would seem that there was no contradiction in their minds between being proud of the Chinese heritage *and* being loyal subjects of the British Empire and its Queen-Empress.

The merchants who arrived in Singapore brought with them traditions of achieving economic success under the rule of other peoples. Chinese merchants thrived economically for generations under the Manchurian emperors of the Ch'ing Dynasty. Hindu and Parsi merchants prospered under Mughal and, later, European rule in India. Arab and Jewish merchants succeeded economically for generations under the rule of the Turkish rulers of the Ottoman Empire. Meanwhile, Scottish merchants grew wealthy in the British Empire, an empire centred in England and reigned over by a royal family which originated in Germany. The business elite in colonial Singapore was made up of Asians and Europeans – Chinese and Indians, Scots and Germans, Arabs and Jews – whose forebears had successfully worked with other peoples for generations, and who had succeeded economically under rulers whom they would have regarded as foreigners in various parts of the world.

---

<sup>54</sup> See: Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, pp. 45 and 64.

<sup>55</sup> This photo is reproduced on the cover of Edwin Lee's book *The British as Rulers*.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

Accounts of colonialism tend to focus on *European* imperialism, on the dichotomy of European rulers versus non-European subjects, on European social exclusivity and ethnocentrism,<sup>56</sup> and on European domination of non-Europeans. However, Europeans have hardly held a monopoly on ethnocentrism, social exclusivity, or imperialism. While it may be true that many Europeans in the colonial era regarded Western civilisation as superior to all others, it is just as likely that Chinese mandarins – and ordinary Chinese too, for that matter – regarded Chinese culture and civilisation as the best in the world, and that all non-Chinese were barbarians; Chinese ethnocentrism was at least the equal to any on earth, and had been formulated and developed in China since ancient times, long before there was a United Kingdom, a German Empire, or, for that matter, a France. Indians, Arabs, and Jews in colonial Singapore presumably held their own cultures and civilisations in high esteem as well. Indeed, many would agree that it is healthy for all peoples to take pride in their own cultures, and naturally, this tends to promote the belief among all peoples that their own cultures are the best. However, taken to extremes, this feeling of national superiority holds the potential of great destruction if taken to extremes, as shown in the case of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan in the 1930s and early 1940s; the examples of Japan and Germany illustrate that ethnocentrism and fascism can happen in both the East and the West. As to imperialism, Europeans were hardly the first people to practice empire-building; many non-European peoples built empires over the centuries, including Arabs, Aztecs, Chinese, Egyptians, Japanese, Mongols, Mughals, Ottomans, Persians, and Phoenicians.

Colonial Singapore may have been formally and officially founded by an Englishman named Raffles, but its development owed as much to enterprising Asian

---

<sup>56</sup> See: Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, pp. 108-110.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

businessmen as to Scots, Germans, and other Europeans.<sup>57</sup> Colonialism in Singapore was as much Asian as European; it was the product of an alliance between Asian and European elites. It is time to break out of the race-based paradigm and the fixation on conflict and, instead, to closely consider the role of the close cooperation of Asian and European elites in colonialism, a line of inquiry which might result in a redefinition of colonialism itself, moving away from the idea of *European* colonialism and towards a more cosmopolitan conceptualisation of colonialism and empire-building.

Over the whole span of the colonial era, the exchange of symbolic capital among Asian and European elites in Singapore contributed to the historical continuity of the social structures of the elite class here. The American sociologist William Goode explained that social structures continue largely due to the fact that these social structures are actually patterns of social actions by individuals – actions which these individuals wish to perform because they have been socialised to find them desirable, or because they are motivated by perceptions of rewards and penalties.<sup>58</sup> The patterns of elite social interactions and linkages in colonial Singapore which comprised the cosmopolitan elite class here were sustained over time because the elites who engaged in these interactions and formed such linkages found them to be rewarding in terms of prestige benefits, as well as in terms of the economic and political rewards involved. Exchanges of prestige among these elites helped to cement the social ties which sustained their class as a cohesive social group. This group or community of elites also provided the social setting or context within which prestige could be made meaningful, valid, and socially real by being made publicly known among the people described by Goode as the *third parties* –

---

<sup>57</sup> See: Ernest Chew, “Founders and Builders of Early Colonial Singapore.” In: Irene Lim, editor. *Sketching the Straits: A Compilation of the Lecture Series on the Charles Dyce Collection*, pp. 23-31.

<sup>58</sup> William J. Goode, *The Celebration of Heroes: Prestige as a Social Control System*, p. 14.

the members of the group or community who evaluate and give validity to the prestige conferred upon individuals.<sup>59</sup>

### **Continuity as the Overarching Theme**

Continuity is the overall theme in the history of the multiracial community of prestige in colonial Singapore. Of course, there was change and growth in the elite social structure through the years. Development over time in the character of the social organisation of the elite class in colonial Singapore included, for example, the increasing elaboration of the elite social structure, the profusion of respectable associations, the growth in the complexity, centralisation, and formalisation of the social connections and institutional networks linking together the Asian and European members of the elite class, and the expansion in the number of the institutions within this network, as well as the building of increasingly grand buildings which served as the settings for the theatre of prestige in which these elites interacted.

Still, the overall impression of the social history of the elite class here from 1819 to 1959 exhibits a remarkable degree of continuity over time; hence the thematic approach of this study, as opposed to a chronological approach. Perhaps there is a tendency for historians to concentrate too much on looking for change over time, and to focus on trying to periodise history as a way of illustrating the nature of change over time; meanwhile, *continuity* in history has, perhaps, been somewhat underrated.

---

<sup>59</sup> William J. Goode, *The Celebration of Heroes*, pp. x, 13, 18, and 40, 100, 103, 120, 152, and 179.



### **Was Divide and Rule Really the Order of the Day?**

In the popular conception, perhaps colonial Singapore is viewed as having been dominated by a British elite who practiced a policy of divide and rule.<sup>60</sup> Whatever truth this view might have with regard to other colonies, this idea must not be accepted uncritically with regard to colonial Singapore. The exploration of the social history of the colonial elite class here calls into question the idea of divide and rule, as well as showing that the elite class included Asians as well as Europeans. The history of the cosmopolitan elite class was characterised not by a policy of divide and rule, but rather by a pattern of elites *uniting* as a class by creating and strengthening connections among themselves.

Southeast Asia was characterised by ethnically plural and cosmopolitan societies long before Europeans arrived on the scene. Whatever dividing-and-ruling of Asian elites that went on in colonial Singapore was accomplished by these Asian elites themselves, as they established institutions such as associations and schools along the lines of ethnic, religious, and linguistic distinctions. This self-segregation was likely due to internal dynamics within the Asian population, rather than to any imposition from European administrators.

The institutionalisation of the divisions within the Chinese, Indian, and other Asian populations of colonial Singapore through the establishment of sub-ethnic associations and schools identified and confirmed the status of the elites of these populations within their own particular sub-ethnic sections. Thus, within the Chinese population, elites were not so much Chinese elites, as Hokkien elites, Teochew elites,

---

<sup>60</sup> Carl A. Trocki, "Political Structures in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," in: Nicholas Tarling, editor, *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia: Volume Two: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, pp. 112-113 and 116.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

Cantonese elites, Hakka elites, Hainanese elites, and Straits Chinese elites respectively.<sup>61</sup> Immigrant categories in Singapore from India and from the Southeast Asian region were also subdivided. This division of the Asian population here cannot be attributed to the colonial authorities. Instead, Asian elites helped to institutionalise and maintain divisions and separate identities within their own sub-ethnic sections, by establishing and sustaining associations and schools along those lines. This was self-segregation from within, rather than some sort of apartheid imposed from outside.

A countervailing trend towards centralisation and consolidation of elites emerged by the early decades of the twentieth century, as Asian elites established organisations which bridged the divisions between sub-ethnic categories, allowing these men to identify themselves as the leaders of all Chinese or all Indians or all Malays respectively. These organisations included the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce, founded in 1906; the Singapore Chinese High School, established in 1918,<sup>62</sup> the Shantung Relief Fund created in 1928, and the Singapore China Relief Fund Committee set up in 1937.<sup>63</sup> Other sections of the population also founded their own associations. The Muslim Association was established by 1900.<sup>64</sup> The Eurasians of Singapore founded the Eurasian Association in 1919.<sup>65</sup> Among the Indian population, there was the Singapore

---

<sup>61</sup> John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India* (1865), p. 141.

<sup>62</sup> C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, p. 130.

<sup>63</sup> C.F. Yong, *Tan Kah-kee: The Making of an Overseas Chinese Legend*, p. 164.

<sup>64</sup> Ismail Kassim, *Problems of Elite Cohesion: A Perspective from a Minority Community*, p. 16, states that the Muslim Association was founded in 1900. However, according to Shahril Mohd Shah, the Muslim Association of Singapore (or *Persekutuan Islam Singapura*) was established in 1894; see: Shahril Mohd Shah, "From the Mohammedan Advisory Board to the Muslim Advisory Board," in: Khoo Kay Kim, Elinah Abdullah, and Wan Meng Hao, editors, *Malays / Muslims in Singapore: Selected Readings in History, 1819-1965*, p. 161.

<sup>65</sup> *Singapore Free Press*, June 6, 1919, p 4; Valerie Barth, "Belonging: Eurasian Clubs and Associations," in: Myrna Braga-Blake, ed., with Ann Ebert-Oehlers. *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes*, p. 100.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

Indian Association, which was established in 1923,<sup>66</sup> and the Indian Merchants Association, which was founded in 1924 and became the Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce in 1935.<sup>67</sup> Such communally-based associations could provide the institutional basis for the discussion of important matters between the leaders of different sections of the population, as noted by the *Malaya Tribune* in 1937.<sup>68</sup> In a way, forming organisations for the different sections of the population could help to bring the leaders of these organisations together.

As Asian elites worked to establish such overarching institutions in the early twentieth century, and thus helped to create or reinforce a sense of the Chinese, Indian, and other populations as communities, they were not struggling against a European colonial establishment bent on imposing a divide-and-rule policy. On the contrary, Asian elites struggled against the tendencies of their own fellow Asians to divide their own populations and to associate along the lines of ethnic and sub-ethnic identities, as they formed ethnic or sub-ethnic based clubs, associations, and schools. The division of the Chinese population into different sections with their own identities and organisations is, perhaps, the most well-known example of the tendency towards intra-communal division, but the Chinese were certainly not alone in this tendency. For example, in 1929, an Indian writer commented on the tendency among the Indian population in Malaya to form associations for people from different Indian states.<sup>69</sup>

As Asian elites worked together to form organisations which embraced large racial or ethnic categories – for example, all Chinese, or all Malays – they not only

---

<sup>66</sup> R.B. Krishnan, *Indians in Malaya: A Pageant of Greater India*, p. 27; Leslie Netto, *Passage of Indians*, pp. 31-32; and: Rajabali Jumabhoy, *Multiracial Singapore – On to the Nineties*, pp. 55-56 and 89.

<sup>67</sup> *Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce Sixtieth Anniversary Memento*, p. 1.

<sup>68</sup> *Malaya Tribune*, 9 June 1937, p. 12, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0005945.

<sup>69</sup> *Malaya Tribune*, July 26, 1929, p. 2, NUS microfilm reel R0005874.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

downplayed the differences between sub-groups within these larger ethnic categories, but also highlighted differences in identities between Chinese and Malays, and other identities. In the nineteenth century, Chinese immigrants to Singapore and Malaya (who typically spoke one of the following five Chinese dialects: Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hainanese, Hakka) might have learned to speak Malay as a second language or *lingua franca*;<sup>70</sup> but in the twentieth century, many Chinese in Singapore and Malaya were learning to speak Mandarin as their second language, which may have pulled them together as Chinese rather than as members of different dialect-speaking groups,<sup>71</sup> while, perhaps, pulling them apart (or pulling them in different directions) from other ethnic groups or identities. Could it be that, ironically, the increasing internal cohesion and identification of the Chinese and the Malays within their own communities during the twentieth century has, possibly, resulted in a heightened emphasis on the social and cultural divisions between these ethnic identities?

Internal self-segregation or ethnic balkanisation was the issue, rather than a Western divide-and-rule policy. In a parallel development, a similar process of internal self-segregation also took place among the European population in colonial Singapore, as they, too, divided their own community by associating with one another along the lines of certain identities. The Europeans living here established separate clubs for the British, the Dutch, the Germans, and the Swiss. Institutionalised social divisions also emerged among the British segment of the population here; when George Peet discovered when he arrived in Singapore in 1923, he found that the British population here was socially divided into at least five main categories: the businessmen and professionals of Raffles

---

<sup>70</sup> See: G.M. Reith, *Handbook to Singapore*, p. 77.

<sup>71</sup> C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, p. 288.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

Place, the government officials of Empress Place, the British staff of the Singapore Harbour Board, the British tradesmen of the department stores, and the officers of the British armed services.<sup>72</sup> Britons connected with the Harbour Board and the armed services each had their own clubs, and lived in certain areas of the Singapore. Thus, the social divisions within the British population in colonial Singapore were reflected spatially as well as institutionally.

To describe the colonial social and political order in Singapore as being characterised by a divide-and-rule policy would seem to be an oversimplified characterization at best. Emily Sadka has pointed out that, when the British arrived in Malaya, they accepted the pre-existing plural organisation of the local society; Sadka criticised the notion that the British had a policy of separating the different communities.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, Khoo Kay Kim pointed out to Robert Heussler that Malaya was more *disunited* when the British arrived than when they left.<sup>74</sup> The accusation of a colonial divide-and-rule policy is equally dubious with regard to Singapore.<sup>75</sup> Instead, the social history of colonial Singapore witnessed the development of connections among the elites of the various communities through participation together in a shared system of status symbols, including holding office together in public bodies such as the Legislative Council and the Municipal Commission, taking part in public celebrations, and attending social gatherings at Government House and private mansions. Thus, the evolution of elite-level social organisation in colonial Singapore was characterised by Asian and

---

<sup>72</sup> For a first-hand account of social divisions among the European population of colonial Singapore in the 1920s, see: George L. Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, pp. 27, 36, 82, 152, 193-194, and 203.

<sup>73</sup> Emily Sadka, *The Protected Malay States 1874-1895*, p. 323.

<sup>74</sup> Robert Heussler, *British Rule in Malaya: The Malayan Civil Service and Its Predecessors, 1867-1942*, p. 167. Heussler cited an interview with Khoo Kay Kim in 1973.

<sup>75</sup> See: E. Kay Gillis, *Singapore Civil Society and British Power*, pp. 22 and 81.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

European elites helping to reinforce and institutionalise distinct identities and groupings within their own sections of the population, while simultaneously building and sustaining social connections and institutions at the elite level, which linked together the Asian and European elites of all occupational, ethnic, and racial sectors into one cosmopolitan elite class. These vertical and horizontal linkages correspond to the *bonding* and *bridging* social capital described by Robert Putnam.<sup>76</sup>

### **The Increasing Elaboration of the Elite Social Structure**

While this study has concentrated on the element of continuity in the social history of the multiracial elite class in colonial Singapore, this study has also made it clear that there was a great deal of historical development in the elite social structure – for example, the establishment of a wide variety of public-sector and private sector organisations, and the institutionalisation of new local traditions, particularly with regard to public celebrations. Still, it is the continuities that stand out – the patterns of cooperative interaction among Asian and European elites through the generations, as they worked together to amass wealth and participated together in a shared system of status symbols to gain the symbolic capital of prestige, social recognition, and face. While these themes remained constant, there was a clear trend towards an increasingly elaborate and ornate elite social structure, featuring an increasingly wide variety and profusion of respectable clubs and other elite-led organisations, which allowed many opportunities for elite social interaction and overlapping memberships. However, the big picture of the elite social structure was still one of continuity of elite-level multiracial interaction – the institutional structure just became more elaborate over the years. This trend is clearly illustrated by the listings of clubs and other associations in the annual local directories,

---

<sup>76</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, pp. 22-24.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

starting in 1846 with *The Straits Times Almanack, Calendar and Directory*. A perusal of the local directories from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century reveals a clear trend towards an increasing profusion of respectable associations. This was a development characterised by elaboration rather than transformation – it was more about continuity than change.

While the elite social structure became increasingly complex, its fundamental nature did not really change over time. It remained, throughout the colonial era, a system of institutions and status symbols, which attracted the participation of socially-ambitious individuals of various races with the promise of social recognition and the affirmation of status. Thus, it continued to function, generation after generation, as a system which located elites of different races together in the same social space, at the centre of the colonial society.

Local trends reflected international or global trends. The dual tracks or parallel trends in the social development of this multiracial elite class – the institutionalisation of *vertical bonding* connections between elites and their sections of the population, as well as *horizontal bridging* linkages among all the elites of different ethnicities at the *summit* level<sup>77</sup> – may be seen as elements of a modernising and centralising process, reflecting worldwide developments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The social organisation of the elite class and the nature of their connections with one another and with the masses evolved over time, from connections which were often informal and personalised, to connections which were increasingly centralised, institutionalised, traditionalised, and routine.

---

<sup>77</sup> See: Arend Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation*, p. 112.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

The social history of the elite class in Singapore from 1819 to 1959 was part of the bigger picture of the development of the increasingly interconnected and globalised modern world, a process which accelerated during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The consolidation and centralisation of the organisational network within colonial Singapore was the local expression of the global trend of societies worldwide to move from traditional *gemeinschaft* social connections characterised by personalised face-to-face linkages in primary groups, to *gesellschaft* relationships and organisations characterised by less personal and more bureaucratic connections in secondary-group settings.

Competing organisations, including companies, associations, and states, may be motivated by competition and challenges to evolve towards greater centralisation, rationalisation, and consolidation, emulating or surpassing their rivals. Organisations that fail to do this may fall behind or disappear, thus encouraging others to take their place. This trend – which is not only a natural trend, but which is also self-reinforcing – is a kind of chain reaction in social organisation, since moves towards centralisation and consolidation in one organisation could inspire and encourage similar developments among other groups. For example, the establishment of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of commerce in 1906 has been described as a response of China-born business elites towards the formation of the Straits Chinese British Association by the Straits-born Chinese in 1900, while the success of the Kuomintang in unifying China and the organisational structures adopted by the Kuomintang government, inspired Tan Kah Kee to work to bring about similar reforms in the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce



### *Conclusions and Implications*

and the Singapore Hokkien Huay Kuan.<sup>78</sup> Chinese business elites developed Singapore's first Chinese banks in the early twentieth century, apparently inspired by the organisational structures and methods of Western banks.<sup>79</sup>

The colonial authorities established the Singapore Chinese Advisory Board in 1890,<sup>80</sup> which brought Chinese elites in Singapore into a more formal institutionalised network of connections with the colonial authorities. The Chinese Advisory Board was established following a decade of efforts by the Chinese government to make connections with Chinese elites in Singapore,<sup>81</sup> as well as a long history of attempts by the colonial government to control or suppress Chinese secret societies and prevent or stop their riots. The Chinese Advisory Board resulted from the need felt by colonial elites that there should be some institution to provide the government with a means of communication and control over the Chinese masses to replace the secret societies, which were outlawed by an Ordinance which took effect in 1890.<sup>82</sup> Thus, the establishment of the Chinese Advisory Board may be seen as the outcome of competition between the colonial government versus various Chinese authorities – the Chinese imperial variety as well as the secret-society variety.

The trend towards centralisation and unification at the summit level of the institutional structure here should be seen in the context of the steadily growing population of the Settlement of Singapore. As the total population grew, so too did the population of elites. More elites meant more potential leaders of clubs and other

---

<sup>78</sup> Hong Liu and Sin-Kiong Wong, *Singapore Chinese Society in Transition: Business, Politics, & Socio-Economic Change, 1945-1965*, pp. 25 and 33.

<sup>79</sup> On the connections between Chinese and Western banks in colonial Singapore, see: Yap Pheng Geck, *Scholar, Banker, Gentleman Soldier*, pp. 36-37, and: Edwin Lee, "The Colonial Legacy," in Kernial Singh Sandhu and Paul Wheatley, editors, *Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore*, p. 10.

<sup>80</sup> *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, 31 January 1890, p. 246, Government Notification No. 79.

<sup>81</sup> C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, p. 297.

<sup>82</sup> Edwin Lee, *The British As Rulers: Governing Multiracial Singapore 1867-1914*, pp. 140-150.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

associations; moreover, the more ambitious individuals there were, the greater the level of demand for institutional avenues for the achievement of social aspirations in the realm of status and prestige. Elites needed organisations to provide them with the leadership positions which publicly confirmed their symbolic capital, converting their subjective reputation for prestige into objectified social status or institutional rank.<sup>83</sup> Elites were confirmed in their possession of objective social status when they take their seats on important councils, boards, and committees, and when they assumed leadership roles in corporations, clubs, and associations. Another form of objective elite status in colonial Singapore was the honour of appointment as a Justice of the Peace, and it should be no surprise to find that the lists of Justices of the Peace (including Asians as well as Europeans) published in the annual local directories became increasingly lengthy as the years passed, in tandem with the increase in population.

### **Countering a Compartmentalising Tendency**

The study of the social activities and patterns of connections among Asian and European elites illustrates the importance of recognising that they formed a cohesive class or multiracial community of elites, instead of boxing them up into separate racial or ethnic compartments.<sup>84</sup> This study has persistently employed the formula of *Asian and European elites* – not for the purpose of separating the Asian elites from the European elites, but rather, as a way of emphasising the social interconnectedness of these elites within a cohesive elite social class or community of prestige. By contrast, if this study of colonial Singapore social history had simply used the term *elites*, it might have conjured

---

<sup>83</sup> See the discussion of subjective and objective status, in: Bryan S. Turner, *Status*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>84</sup> Regarding the problem of compartmentalisation and the importance of multiethnic interactions in colonial-era Malaya, see: Wu Xiao An, *Chinese Business in the Making of a Malay State, 1882-1941: Kedah and Penang*, pp. 4, 6, 10, 181-182, and 187.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

up in the minds of the readers an image of a racially homogenous group – comprised, perhaps, of only European colonial government officials – rather than the cosmopolitan elite class comprised of Asian and European businessmen, officials, and professionals, which actually existed here throughout the colonial era. Hopefully, by the time any determined readers reach the conclusion of this study, they will have an appreciation of the racial and cultural diversity and cosmopolitanism of the community of elites in colonial Singapore, as well as an understanding of how these elites were socially linked together through the sharing and exchange of symbolic capital within their institutions, social events, and public celebrations. This study has referred to *Asian elites* and *European elites* precisely in an effort to overcome and counteract any tendency to compartmentalise<sup>85</sup> these racial and cultural categories into a simplistic binary racial dichotomy of two opposing camps locked in continuous conflict, or domination and subordination along racial lines<sup>86</sup> – the reality was just not that simple or clear cut. Cooperation among the elites and compliance on the part of the masses were far more important social dynamics than conflict in the colonial era.

While there was a gradual process of evolution in the development of the cosmopolitan elite class, as the patterns of relationships between Asian and European elites became increasingly elaborate, formal, and institutional over time, the cooperative

---

<sup>85</sup> Regarding the problem of compartmentalisation and the importance of multiethnic interactions in colonial-era Malaya, see: Wu Xiao An, *Chinese Business in the Making of a Malay State, 1882-1941: Kedah and Penang*, pp. 4, 6, 10, 181-182, and 187.

<sup>86</sup> For example, regarding the negative and subordinate image of compradores in postcolonial literature, see: Rajat Kanta Ray, "Asian Capital in the Age of European Domination: The Rise of the Bazaar, 1800-1914," *Modern Asian Studies*, Volume 29, Number 3 (July 1995), pp. 485 and 553; and: Bryna Goodman, "Improvisations on a Semicolonial Theme, or, How to Read a Celebration of Transnational Urban Community," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Volume 59, Number 4 (November 2000), p. 919. Regarding the dichotomy of the colonised and the colonisers, see: Ann Laura Stoler, "Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Volume 31, Number 1 (January 1989), pp. 134-161.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

and mutually-beneficial relationship between Asian and European elites was characterised nevertheless far more by continuity than by change throughout the colonial era. The creation, exchange, and shared enjoyment of the symbolic capital of prestige, honour, and status, among Asian and European elites sustained the social capital of the networks and patterns of relationships and connections which socially bridged their cultural differences and linked them together into a cohesive elite class – a cosmopolitan community of prestige. The social networks and institutions and the patterns of relationships and interactions of the elite class functioned as a distribution system for symbolic capital with their community. The social rewards of prestige, honour, and status comprised the social rewards which motivated Asian and European elites to play (and keep playing) the social game which combined them into a cohesive class.<sup>87</sup> As these elites played the social game together, they recognised one another's status symbols, prestige, and social rank within their shared elite class identity, and thus they thereby created, sustained, and reproduced the social structure of their multiracial elite class, generation after generation.<sup>88</sup>

### **Elite-Level Cooperation and Mass-Level Compliance**

On one level, this study has focused on explaining how Asian and European elites were socially linked as members of a cosmopolitan elite class, through their cooperation

---

<sup>87</sup> Regarding the concept of a *social game*, see: E. Digby Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class*, pp. 11-12; Peter Burke, *The Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society in Italy*, p. 194; Norton E. Long, "The Local Community as an Ecology of Games," *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (November 1958), p. 261; David Silverman, *The Theory of Organisations: A Sociological Framework*, pp. 210-212; and: Harvey Warren Zorbaugh, *The Gold Coast and the Slum: A Sociological Study of Chicago's Near North Side*, pp. 49-64 and 279. See also the mention of the *game of honour* in: Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, p. 22.

<sup>88</sup> See: Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power," in: *Sociological Theory*, Volume 7, Number 1 (Spring 1989), p. 23; Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, p. 135; and: Pierre Bourdieu, "What Makes a Social Class? On The Theoretical and Practical Existence Of Groups," in: *Berkeley Journal of Sociology: A Critical Review*, Volume XXXII, 1987, p. 15.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

in creating and sharing symbolic capital. On another level, this study has suggested the need to avoid an tendency to privilege or overemphasise the theme of social conflict in history, and instead to pay close attention to the theme of *non-conflict* – that is, cooperation and interdependence among elites, and compliance and acquiescence on the part of the workers. Finally, on yet another level, this study has suggested a cosmopolitan or multiracial interpretation of colonialism itself, seeing the colonial system in Singapore and its Malayan hinterland as *Asian* as well as European, and emphasising their interaction and the need to avoid a compartmentalised view of Asian and European elites.<sup>89</sup>

Although conflict is undeniably a characteristic of human interactions, *non-conflict* is clearly more fundamental than conflict in society and in history. The achievement of non-conflict – including cooperation and teamwork by some, as well as compliance and the acceptance of authority by others – as the dominant theme in social interactions, is a necessary precondition in order for a society to exist, for a political party to gain and hold power, for a company to turn a profit, for a team to win a sporting event, for an orchestra to perform a symphony, for an army to win a battle, and for a nation to win a war. All organised human activity – even, ironically, the most extreme conflict entailed in the prosecution of warfare – is necessarily mainly about finding ways to avoid conflict *within* the society, the community, or the group. Thus, any attempt to view social history – or political history, cultural history, economic history, military history, or any other sort of history, for that matter – as being mainly about conflict, resistance, struggle, and so on, would be to fixate on a few trees while ignoring the rest of the forest.

---

<sup>89</sup> Regarding the problem of compartmentalisation and the importance of multiethnic interactions in colonial-era Malaya, see: Wu Xiao An, *Chinese Business in the Making of a Malay State, 1882-1941: Kedah and Penang*, pp. 4, 6, 10, 181-182, and 187.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

The society of colonial Singapore was characterised by elites who were generally cooperative and by a general population which was, for the most part, compliant towards elite authority; and the reciprocal exchange of symbolic capital at the elite level fostered not only the cooperation of these elites, but also the legitimacy of their status as elites and the authority of these elites over the masses.

Violent conflicts or riots in colonial Singapore tended to occur between different groups of Asians – for example, street battles between different groups of Chinese coolie labourers, or between Chinese coolies and Indian policemen. As far as conflict between Asian labourers versus Europeans was concerned, this would likely have been rare if for no other reason than simply because the average Asian worker probably had little or no contact with Europeans whatsoever. According to the census of 1828, there were only 122 Europeans in Singapore in that year.<sup>90</sup> The European population was still tiny even in the middle of the nineteenth century; there were a mere 198 Europeans here in 1849.<sup>91</sup> There were less than five hundred Europeans in Singapore in 1860, and in 1881 there were less than three thousand;<sup>92</sup> even as late as 1921 there were only 6,231 Europeans here.<sup>93</sup> To the ordinary Asian labourers, commonly known as *coolies*, the *ang moh* inhabitants of Singapore must have been remote figures, strange and outlandishly pallid or reddish-skinned foreign devils and barbarians, who had little or nothing to do with the everyday lives of the hardworking Chinese masses. It is easy to imagine that the coolies

---

<sup>90</sup> A report on the 1828 census appeared in the *Singapore Chronicle*, 12 February 1829, p. 2, R0012372.

<sup>91</sup> Charles Burton Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 533.

<sup>92</sup> C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore*, pp. 38 (1860) and 96 (1881). Regarding the population of Singapore according to nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century census reports, see: Sir Hayes Marriott, "Population of the Straits Settlements and Malay Peninsula during the last Century," *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, No. 62 (December 1912), p. 31 and the following tables, and: Sir Hayes Marriott, "Inhabitants and Population," in: Walter Makepeace, Gilbert E. Brooke, and Roland St. J. Braddell, editors, *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume One, pp. 341-362.

<sup>93</sup> J.E. Nathan, *The Census of British Malaya ... 1921*, p. 70.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

of nineteenth and early twentieth-century Singapore typically encountered representatives of authority over their lives not in the form of *ang mohs*, but rather, in the form of wealthy Chinese towkays and community leaders, Malay, Sikh, Tamil, and other Indian policemen,<sup>94</sup> Sepoy soldiers, and (for at least some of the coolies) moneylenders,<sup>95</sup> Chinese secret society *samsengs* or henchmen,<sup>96</sup> keepers of gambling-dens and opium-dens, brothel keepers,<sup>97</sup> and the agents or rent-collectors of the Asian landlords<sup>98</sup> who owned the buildings where the workers lived.<sup>99</sup>

Thus, for the coolie labourers, authority was usually represented by fellow Asians, who were often acting under the authority of wealthy Asian elites. The authority of these Asian elites was based on their wealth or their status within Asian organisations. Even if an ordinary *sinkeh* or newly-arrived immigrant from China were to meet an *ang moh*, communication between them would likely have been rather difficult, since it would have taken some time for the *sinkeh* to learn the bazaar or Baba Malay which served as the local *lingua franca*.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, while Europeans here often learned at least a limited Malay vocabulary, it was apparently uncommon for Europeans here to learn to speak any

---

<sup>94</sup> Regarding the police, see: René Onraet, *Singapore – A Police Background*, p. 74; G.M. Reith, *Handbook to Singapore*, p. 26; and: Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, pp. 32, 37, 47, 54 and 159-161.

<sup>95</sup> George Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, p. 112.

<sup>96</sup> See: Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, pp. 61 and 273; and Maurice Freedman, “Immigrants and Associations” in: Freedman, *Chinese Society*, p. 73.

<sup>97</sup> Regarding opium, gambling, and prostitution among the Chinese in colonial Singapore, see: Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, pp. 222-258. Regarding prostitution, see: Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, pp. 27, 29, 39-40, 86-92, 98, and 160, and: James Francis Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayuki-san: Prostitution in Singapore 1870-1940*.

<sup>98</sup> See the mention of Arab and Chinese landlords in: Edwin Lee, “The Colonial Legacy,” in Kernial Singh Sandhu and Paul Wheatley, editors, *Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore*, p. 17. Regarding Arab property owners, see: Ulrike Freitag, “Arab Merchants in Singapore: Attempt of a Collective Biography,” in: Huub de Jonge and Nico Kaptein, editors, *Transcending Borders: Arabs, Politics, Trade and Islam in Southeast Asia*, pp. 117, 119, and 124. Regarding Chinese property owners, see: Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History*, p. 145. Sir Ong Siang Song (1923, p. 44) mentioned a rent collector.

<sup>99</sup> For information on the lives of coolies, see: James Francis Warren, *Rickshaw Coolie*.

<sup>100</sup> George Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, pp. 92-93 and 156-160.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

dialect of Chinese. In 1876, the *Straits Times* reported that there were, at most, only two Europeans here who were able to speak Chinese.<sup>101</sup> By the early decades of the twentieth century, young European police officers and Chinese Protectorate officials were sent to China to learn Hokkien or Cantonese,<sup>102</sup> but encounters with these colonial officials would not likely have been part of the daily life of ordinary Chinese workers.

The Asians who *did* have daily or at least sustained and regular contact and relationships with specific *ang mohs* year after year can be divided into two groups, one socially subordinate and another of high status: on the one hand, there were the Europeans' personal household servants, drivers, clerical workers and office *tambies*.<sup>103</sup> On the other hand, there were the prosperous and respected high-status Asian residents, whom the European elites knew as *compradores*,<sup>104</sup> business partners, associates, colleagues, managers, clients, contractors, and investors. This study is largely concerned with patterns of interactions and institutional connections between this latter group of high-status Asians and their European fellow elites on the same social level of prestige, and how these social linkages among elites of different races were fostered by reciprocal exchanges of symbolic capital. These Asian elites played an indispensable role in the evolution of the colonial system, and to the extent that colonial society had a single social structure with a single centre, this was the outcome of interactions between these Asian elites and their Western fellow elites. Thus, this study is more concerned with the

---

<sup>101</sup> *Straits Times*, 17 June 1876, p. 1, R0016425.

<sup>102</sup> See: René Onraet, *Singapore – A Police Background*, pp. 35-38.

<sup>103</sup> George Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, pp. 89, 156-157, 159.

<sup>104</sup> Regarding *compradores* in Singapore, see: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 164 and 273; Wong Lin Ken, "Commercial Growth before the Second World War," in: Ernest C.T. Chew and Edwin Lee, editors, *A History of Singapore*, p. 60; and: Chiang Hai Ding, "Sino-British Mercantile Relations In Singapore's Entrepôt Trade 1870-1915," in: Jerome Ch'en and Nicholas Tarling, editors, *Studies in the Social History of China and South-East Asia: Essays in Memory of Victor Purcell*, p. 255.



## *Conclusions and Implications*

horizontal social integration between Asian and European elites who were in the same social class, rather than the vertical social and organisational connections between these elites and their non-elite contemporaries.

### **Secret Societies and Chinese Elites**

Where did the secret society leaders, who were so important in Singapore in the nineteenth century, fit into this elite social structure? Clearly, Chinese leaders possessed a great deal of unofficial power within the Chinese population in the nineteenth century.<sup>105</sup> According to an article which appeared in the *Singapore Free Press* in 1860, almost all of the Chinese in the Straits at that time belonged to the secret societies.<sup>106</sup> K.G. Tregonning has explained that the secret societies did not try to overthrow the colonial government because these societies benefited from the colonial order.<sup>107</sup> There were riots from time to time in colonial Singapore, which often involved different groups of Chinese;<sup>108</sup> in 1851, Chinese secret society members attacked Chinese Catholics, and the Chinese riots in 1854, as well as several other Chinese riots in the 1870s, involved Hokkiens versus Teochews.<sup>109</sup> However, there seems to have been remarkably little hostility directed at the Europeans;<sup>110</sup> indeed, there are accounts which indicate that Chinese rioters may have carefully avoided attacks upon Europeans on certain occasions,

---

<sup>105</sup> On Chinese power in nineteenth-century Singapore, see: K.G. Tregonning, *The British in Malaya: The First Forty Years 1786-1826*, p. 158; Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, pp. 30, 47, 53, 61, 117, 273, and 274-275; Lea E. Williams, "Chinese Leadership in Early British Singapore," *Asian Studies*, Volume II, Number 2, August 1964, pp. 170-179; and: Paul Kratoska's Introduction to: The Rev. G.M. Reith, M.A., *Handbook to Singapore with Map*, republished in 1985, pp. vi-vii.

<sup>106</sup> *Singapore Free Press*, 6 January 1860, p. 1, R0006023.

<sup>107</sup> K.G. Tregonning, *The British in Malaya: The First Forty Years 1786-1826*, p. 158. See also: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, p. 304.

<sup>108</sup> Edwin Lee, *The British As Rulers*, pp. 35-47; John N. Miksic, "From Fieldworks to Fort Canning 1823-1866," in: Malcolm H. Murfett *et al.*, *Between Two Oceans*, p. 63.

<sup>109</sup> J.D. Vaughan, *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese of the Straits Settlements* (originally published in 1879, republished in 1985), p. 99; Wilfred Blythe, *The Impact of Chinese Secret Societies*, p. 79; and: Edwin Lee, *The British As Rulers*, pp. 35-47.

<sup>110</sup> John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions* (1865), p. 256; Wilfred Blythe, *The Impact of Chinese Secret Societies in Malaya*, p. 77.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

even while these Chinese were busy fighting amongst themselves.<sup>111</sup> For example, no policemen were injured or killed during the Chinese riots in May 1854, although more than five hundred rioters were taken prisoner.<sup>112</sup>

Perhaps the lack of any widespread hostility or violence directed at Europeans by Chinese rioters in nineteenth-century Singapore indicated that the Chinese rioters were under orders from their leaders to refrain from attacking the local *ang moh* population; after all, the wealth and status of the leading Chinese elites depended on their continued cooperation with their European fellow elites and business partners, and so the Chinese elites must have disapproved of any interference by the rioters in this profitable joint venture, and would likely have exerted whatever influence they had with the secret societies to prevent any disruption of this Sino-Western joint venture. From time to time in the nineteenth century, prominent Chinese businessmen cooperated with the colonial authorities to help restore order among the Chinese and stop riots,<sup>113</sup> thereby publicly endorsing the colonial order. After an explosion of violence in the jungles of Kranji and Bukit Timah in 1851, Chinese plantation owners donated funds to compensate Chinese Catholics who had been attacked by secret society members.<sup>114</sup> J.D. Vaughan, who was very familiar with the Chinese of mid-nineteenth-century Singapore, asserted in 1879 that the Chinese secret societies were actually working to keep the peace on this island.<sup>115</sup>

---

<sup>111</sup> John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions* (1865), p. 267; J.D. Vaughan, *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese* (1879; republished in 1985), p. 101; and: W.H. Read, *Play and Politics* (1901), p. 98. See also: C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, pp. 585-586; and: John N. Miksic, "From Fieldworks to Fort Canning 1823-1866," in: Malcolm H. Murfett et al., *Between Two Oceans*, p. 63.

<sup>112</sup> Wilfred Blythe, *The Impact of Chinese Secret Societies in Malaya*, p. 77.

<sup>113</sup> C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership*, pp. 13-14 and 15-16; Edwin Lee, *The British As Rulers*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>114</sup> Wilfred Blythe, *The Impact of Chinese Secret Societies in Malaya*, p. 71.

<sup>115</sup> J.D. Vaughan, *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese* (1879; republished in 1985), pp. 98 and 101. See also: Edwin Lee, *The British As Rulers*, pp. 38, 42, 94-95, 98-99, 114, 127, 135-137, 274-275, and 288; and: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power*, pp. 293-294.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

It has been suggested that some of the leading Chinese businessmen in nineteenth-century Singapore may have been connected with the powerful secret societies when these societies were still legal, prior to 1890, when the government finally outlawed these organisations.<sup>116</sup> Indeed, it has been asserted that the secret societies were involved in a mutually-beneficial economic relationship with at least some of the Chinese elites.<sup>117</sup> John Thomson, a Scottish photographer who lived in Singapore in the 1860s, claimed that the robbers who attacked houses here in large gangs only rarely targeted the homes of the wealthy Chinese,<sup>118</sup> which may suggest that these wealthy Chinese had at least some influence over the secret societies.<sup>119</sup> So, when European officials and businessmen socialised with Chinese business elites in the nineteenth century, they *may* have thereby established social ties with individuals who had connections to the secret societies; but, of course, this could be very difficult to prove. In any event, since the secret societies were still legal until 1890, it was not a crime for either the Asian elites or the Europeans to make connections with the leaders of the secret societies at that time.<sup>120</sup>

If there *were* connections between the Chinese secret societies and the *respectable* Chinese colonial elites who socialised with their European fellow elites, then we might wonder why these Chinese elites would have allowed any factionalism or rioting to take place among different groups within the Chinese population. One plausible answer is that these Chinese elites had only a limited degree of influence over the secret society

---

<sup>116</sup> Wilfred Blythe, *The Impact of Chinese Secret Societies*, p. 56; Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, pp. 28-29; C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership*, pp. xvi, 10-11, and 294; Carl Trocki, *Opium and Empire*, pp. 156-157 and 180-181.

<sup>117</sup> Carl A. Trocki, *Opium and Empire*, p. 180.

<sup>118</sup> John Thomson, *The Straits of Malacca*, p. 64.

<sup>119</sup> Compare this with: C. Northcote Parkinson, *Parkinson's Law or the Pursuit of Progress*, p. 80.

<sup>120</sup> On the legal status of the secret societies prior to 1890, see: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership*, p. xvi.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

rioters – after all, power is a *variable concept*,<sup>121</sup> which may exist in different degrees and need not be absolute. It is not just a question of whether or not the Chinese elites had some degree of control over the secret societies, but, if they did, then how much influence did they have. Perhaps the Chinese elites could influence the rioters only to the extent of attempting to channel and contain their activities. This hypothesis leads to the somewhat paradoxical possibility that the nature of the activities of Chinese rioters and their organisations may, in fact, have reinforced the position of Asian and European elites within the colonial social, economic, and political structure; and that the tensions within the Chinese masses had been channelled into forms which served elite interests.

Whatever the connections – if any – between the Chinese elites and the Chinese rioters or street fighters, it would seem that the organisation of the Chinese workers into opposing factions may well have served the interests of Chinese and European elites alike, by channelling the frustrations and violent impulses of disgruntled working-class Chinese men in directions which did not seriously threaten the establishment. The factionalism and secret society organisation of Chinese workers meant that the Chinese street fighters vented their frustrations on each other from time to time, instead of on the privileged Asian and European elites and their colonial system. If this interpretation fits the historical evidence, it would suggest that the Chinese riots should be seen not as examples of resistance or contestation against the colonial system, but rather as the products of a safety-valve mechanism which resulted in the frustrations of the working-

---

<sup>121</sup> Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, p. 20.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

class Chinese being directed against one another – a social mechanism which reinforced the colonial system and the authority of its Asian and European elites.<sup>122</sup>

Meanwhile, because of these occasional outbreaks of violence, the Chinese elites found opportunities to conspicuously demonstrate their loyalty to the colonial system from time to time, by offering to help restore order during riots. These public-spirited efforts brought leading Chinese into cooperative interaction with high-ranking colonial officials, who were doubtlessly appreciative of the good citizenship of these Chinese elites. For example, during the ceremonial investiture of the Honourable Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa as a Companion of the Order of St. Michael and St. George (or CMG) at the Town Hall in 1876, Governor Jervois delivered a speech in which he publicly honoured the popular Cantonese businessman for his help in restoring order on several occasions. This ceremony, which was attended by many Asian and European elites, including the Maharajah of Johore, military and naval officers, Chinese members of the Gambier Society, and the consuls of Austria, Brazil, and Portugal, must have given the Honourable Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa enormous prestige, even beyond the public honour which he had already enjoyed, thanks to his appointment as the first Chinese Legislative Councillor in the Straits Settlements by Queen Victoria in 1869.<sup>123</sup> After years of cooperating closely with his European fellow elites, Whampoa was rewarded with a CMG from Queen Victoria, delivered by the Governor in front of an assembly of members of the multiracial elite class, including the Maharajah of Johore, as well as Chinese and European elites. The *Straits Times* published a detailed report on the ceremony, including the text of the

---

<sup>122</sup> Regarding the function of conflict as a safety-valve, see: William T. Rowe, *Hankow: Conflict and Community in a Chinese City, 1796-1895*, p. 216.

<sup>123</sup> *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, No. 52, 24 December 1869, p. 774, Government Notification No. 249

### *Conclusions and Implications*

Governor's speech, and a list of the names of the many Asian and European elites who heard the speech and witnessed the Governor decorating Whampoa with the CMG medal.<sup>124</sup>

If we regard the public honouring of Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa in 1876 as the result, at least in part, of his services in the suppression of riots, then we may conclude that the street battles of Chinese rioters actually helped bring about this ceremonial gathering of Asian and European elites in a ritual of elite solidarity, a ritual which reinforced their sense of belonging to the same symbolic system and the same community of prestige, at the centre of the colonial society. Elite social integration was, therefore, partly an unintended result of Chinese rioting. Violent acts, which may have appeared to be resistance or contestation, actually helped to sustain and strengthen the colonial system, and the social cohesion of its multiracial elite class.

Ironically, then, occasional incidents of disorder may have served to preserve and reinforce colonial order, as the sporadic defiance of colonial authority by Chinese rioters functioned to sustain and enhance the prestige of Chinese elites within the colonial system. Chinese street battles may have actually functioned to sustain overall social stability, and to protect the social position of the Asian and European colonial elites, by providing outlets or safety valves for the energies of discontented members of the working class.<sup>125</sup> Thus, when working-class Chinese in colonial Singapore decided to violently express their frustrations, they did so not by attacking Europeans, or Chinese elites, but rather by beating up or killing their fellow working-class Chinese, who belonged to different sections within the Chinese working-class majority.

---

<sup>124</sup> *Straits Times*, 13 May 1876, p. 2, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016425.

<sup>125</sup> Regarding the function of conflict as a safety-valve, see: William T. Rowe, *Hankow: Conflict and Community in a Chinese City, 1796-1895*, p. 216.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

While such rioting was under way, the colonial political, economic, and social power structure – led by Asian and European elites – remained firmly in place; far from being challenged by the riots, the power structure’s strength and authority was actually confirmed repeatedly by its ability to smoothly ride out each of these brief storms, with no apparent damage to the system. During a meeting of the Legislative Council in September 1869, a European member of the Council even suggested that it was better to allow the Chinese secret societies to riot out in the open, instead of secretly.<sup>126</sup> In any event, the colonial system, with its alliance of Asian and European elites, did not appear to have been harmed in the least by the occasional outbreaks of Chinese rioting in the nineteenth century. This should not be surprising, *if we conclude that the Chinese riots functioned to reinforce the colonial system, rather than to resist or contest it.*

In contrast, considering the history of the Settlement from its founding in 1819 to its fall in 1942, the two most infamous and tragic events which *did* result in the deaths of the defenders of the colonial system in Singapore (as well as other people) in the early decades of the twentieth century were *not* riots, and did *not* involve Chinese; these events were: the mutiny of Indian soldiers in Singapore in 1915, and the invasion and conquest of Singapore by Japanese soldiers in 1942. Ironically, the 1915 mutiny was perpetrated by fighting men who had been trained and brought here by British authorities to defend the Empire, while the 1942 invasion was carried out by Britain’s erstwhile close allies and protégés. Thus, it would seem that the real threat to the colonial system on this island during the first twelve decades of its history was not from the fighting men among the local Chinese populace, but rather from very different sorts of enemies.

---

<sup>126</sup> Wilfred Blythe, *The Impact of Chinese Secret Societies*, p. 151.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

Paradoxically enough, the development and persistence of Chinese secret societies in nineteenth-century Singapore may be seen as having been a possible contributing factor towards elite-level interracial social integration, including the development of the institutional network which gave this society a centre and some sense of overarching community,<sup>127</sup> despite occasional outbreaks of street battles among certain elements of the Chinese population. As secret societies fought with each other – and as their hostilities toward one another simmered in the intervals between their street battles – they likely became more cohesive as organisations,<sup>128</sup> which would have tended to increase the power and influence of their leaders within the Chinese population, and thus likely motivated other elites to cultivate connections (informally, at least) with these secret society leaders.<sup>129</sup> Secret society leaders – and those who had influence over secret societies – could demonstrate their influence by starting, controlling, and stopping the street battles. It would be only natural for merchants to wish to stay on cordial terms with such individuals, and with those who could act as intermediaries between secret societies and the wider society. Thus, paradoxically, hostilities among members of different secret societies may not only have contributed to the influence of certain elites, while releasing tensions which might otherwise have been directed at elites, but likely

---

<sup>127</sup> See: William T. Rowe, *Hankow: Conflict and Community in a Chinese City, 1796-1895* (1989), pp. 8 and 347.

<sup>128</sup> On how conflict between groups can promote the integration and cohesion of these groups, see: Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, p. 103; William T. Rowe, *Hankow: Conflict and Community in a Chinese City, 1796-1895* (1989), pp. 8 and 347; Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, p. 91; and: Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, p. 368.

<sup>129</sup> On the allegations of connections between leading Chinese and the secret societies in the nineteenth century, see: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, pp. xvi, 10-11, and 294; Carl A. Trocki, *Opium and Empire: Chinese Society in Colonial Singapore, 1800-1910*, pp. 156, 180-181, 222, and 223; and: Edwin Lee, *The British As Rulers: Governing Multiracial Singapore 1867-1914*, pp. 28-29. See also: John Thomson, *The Straits of Malacca* (1875), p. 64.



## *Conclusions and Implications*

also fostered some degree of elite-level social integration, both within the Chinese population, and with European colonial elites.<sup>130</sup>

Societies in the past as well as in the present have been characterised by some individuals cooperating in the cultivation of elite-level connections and alliances, and the establishment and legitimation of networks, institutions, and organisations; and the rest of the population – the majority – usually complying with the authority of these elites. Whether elites are regarded positively or negatively, the fact remains that they do integrate and organise societies. The life of any society is predominantly characterised by processes of elite-level cooperation and by the compliance of the majority, rather than by conflict or resistance. This must be so, because, if any society becomes mainly about conflict, that society will thereby cease to exist. Within the context of cooperation and compliance there can be elements and incidents of struggle, strife, and opposition, and since these may be exceptional, remarkable, and dramatic, they may receive a great deal of attention by the writers of the documents which comprise the historical record, as well as by the compilers and historians who study these documents. Riots, street battles, strikes, protests, and demonstrations naturally attract a great deal of attention, not only at the time of their occurrence, but also in the written records and historical works. The dramatic – and potentially heroic or tragic – nature of conflict and resistance could result in its overemphasis in historical narratives.<sup>131</sup>

---

<sup>130</sup> On the relationship between the colonial authorities and the secret societies in the nineteenth century, see: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, p. 293; Carl A. Trocki, *Opium and Empire: Chinese Society in Colonial Singapore, 1800-1910*, pp. 156, 180, and 223; and: Edwin Lee, *The British As Rulers: Governing Multiracial Singapore 1867-1914*, pp. 38, 94-95, 98-99, 114, 127, 135-137, 274-275, and 288.

<sup>131</sup> On the dramatic nature of conflict, see: Edward Shils, “The Integration of Society,” in: Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*, p. 83; on the heroic element of conflict, see p. 49. See also the mention of the interest of historians in dramatic events, in: Michael A. Aung-Thwin, *Myth and History in the Historiography of Early Burma: Paradigms, Primary Sources, and Prejudices*, p. 92. See

### **The Multiracial Nature of Colonialism**

It was among the Asian and European elites – as partners, joint stakeholders and mutual beneficiaries in the colonial system in Singapore and its Malayan hinterland – that the different racial, cultural, and occupational sectors of the island’s population combined into an overarching society. To gain a sense of the overall reality of social history here in the colonial era – as well as political and economic history, for that matter – it is essential to consider the activities of *both* the Asian elites *and* the European elites, *as well as* their cooperative interaction within the colonial system in Singapore and Malaya as a whole. These Asian and European elites controlled the importation, distribution, and management of immigrant labour, the development of infrastructure and transportation, the extraction and processing of mineral resources, the cultivation of plantations and the investment of capital. Just as the economic relationship between Asian and European businessmen was characterised by a great deal of interdependence and complementarity,<sup>132</sup> so too was there a high degree of interdependence and complementarity in their interactions within the political and social realms. Their cooperation for material gain paralleled their equally close cooperation for gains measured in terms of symbolic capital, while their exchanges of prestige promoted their continued cooperation and the forming of connections. Of course, this is not to suggest that the networks of colonial connections did not extend beyond the Malayan Peninsula. Examples may be cited for connections between Singapore and places outside Malaya.

---

also: Yong Mun Cheong, “Some Thoughts on Modernization and Race Relations in the Political History of Singapore,” in: Yong Mun Cheong, editor, *Asian Traditions and Modernization: Perspectives from Singapore*, p. 70.

<sup>132</sup> Regarding the interdependence and complementarity of the relationship of Chinese and European businessmen in the entrepôt trade of colonial Singapore, see: Wong Lin Ken, “Commercial Growth Before The Second World War” in: Ernest C. T. Chew and Edwin Lee, editors, *A History of Singapore*, pp. 60 and 62; Carl Trocki, *Opium and Empire*, p. 4; and: Chiang Hai Ding, *A History of Straits Settlements Foreign Trade 1870-1915*, p. 53; see also p. 58.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

Tan Tock Seng's eldest son, Tan Kim Ching, owned rice mills at Saigon and in Siam.<sup>133</sup>

The wealthy Oei Tiong Ham of Java moved to Singapore at the end of his life, and died in his residence at Dalvey Road in 1924.<sup>134</sup> Lee Hoon Leong, who was born in 1871 in Singapore, went to work for a shipping line that was owned by Oei Tiong Ham; Lee married in Java, and his son was born there, but he moved back to Singapore, where Oei appointed him to look out for the Oei interests in Singapore.<sup>135</sup> These examples suggests that connections extended across the boundary between the Dutch and British colonial spheres; but this study is mainly concerned with Singapore and, to a lesser extent, its Malayan hinterland.

This study has illustrated how people of different races and cultures were able to integrate socially, *despite* their cultural differences, and to engage in patterns of mutually-beneficial cooperation to attain shared material and symbolic goals. This process of transracial and transcultural cosmopolitan social integration activated by the characteristic striving of elites for symbolic capital,<sup>136</sup> which occurred here in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is at least as relevant to the world in the early twenty-first century, as globalisation brings people of different races and cultures into contact with one another in cosmopolitan settings around the world. It seems certain that cosmopolitan groups of elites in many lands will find ways to cooperate in building social bridges and networks in spite of their cultural differences,<sup>137</sup> as they find common ground in their shared interests in establishing and sustaining order and the rule of law, and in the

---

<sup>133</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>134</sup> *Malaya Tribune*, 4 June 1924, p. 7.

<sup>135</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>136</sup> Compare with: Anthony Milner, *Kerajaan*, p. 114.

<sup>137</sup> See the critique of Furnivall's conception of the *plural society*, with reference to colonial societies in Africa, in: H.S. Morris, "The Plural Society," *Man*, Volume 57 (August 1957), pp. 124-125.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

acquisition and enhancement of their economic, social, and symbolic capital. Just as the multiracial elite class was crucial to the society of colonial Singapore since this class provided the point of contact connecting the different sectors of the island's population, so too may socially integrated cosmopolitan elites promote the cohesion of other diverse societies at the overarching level of communities of prestige.

One of the implications of this study is a reflection upon – and perhaps a reconsideration of – the nature of colonialism itself, as least as it was manifested in Singapore. Specifically, this study suggests the need to consider the extent to which colonialism was *European*. Colonial Singapore was a rich man's paradise, where for most of the colonial era there was no income tax,<sup>138</sup> and where it was believed that the richest people were Chinese and other Asians<sup>139</sup> – a conclusion which was supported by the observation that the most sumptuous private residences on the island were the homes of wealthy Asians. An alliance of Asian and European elites directed the development of Singapore as a colonial port city. To refer to this multiracial partnership or joint enterprise as *European* colonialism is misleading, since power<sup>140</sup> and the rewards of wealth and prestige were shared among the elites of different races. This is, of course,

---

<sup>138</sup> Income tax was introduced in 1917, withdrawn in 1922, and re-introduced in 1941 and again in 1947. Regarding the income tax, see: *British Malaya* magazine, March 1937, p. 255, and September 1940, p. 70; Chiang Hai Ding, *A History of Straits Settlements Foreign Trade 1870-1915*, pp. 35-36; Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, p. 103; George Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, pp. 196-197; C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*, pp. 72, 114, 129, 153, 160, and 230.

<sup>139</sup> Regarding the wealth of the Chinese and other Asians in Singapore, see: Minute by Governor Robert Fullerton, dated 24<sup>th</sup> August 1829, published as extract number 154 in: C.D. Cowan, editor, "Early Penang & the Rise of Singapore 1805-1832: Documents from the manuscript records of the East India Company..." in the *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. XXIII, Pt. II, March 1950, p. 192 (I am grateful to Clement Liew for kindly bringing this extract to my attention); *Singapore Chronicle*, 1 July 1830, p. 3, R0009222; John Dill Ross, *The Capital of a Little Empire* (1898), p. 69; Ashley Gibson, *The Malay Peninsula and Archipelago*, (1928), p. 32; and: John H. MacCallum Scott, *Eastern Journey* (1939), p. 18.

<sup>140</sup> On Chinese power in mid-nineteenth-century Singapore, see: Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, pp. 30, 47, 53, 61, 117, 273, and 274-275; C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, pp. 10, 11, 110, 299, and 304; and: K.G. Tregonning, *The British in Malaya: The First Forty Years 1786-1826*, p. 158.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

certainly not to deny that colonialism in Singapore was European; rather, the point is that colonialism here was actually *both Asian and European*; the development of this system was directed by, and was for the benefit of, Asian business elites *as well as* European business and official elites. Colonialism in Singapore was a joint effort of Asian and European elites. If the richest and most successful businessmen in colonial Singapore – and, hence, the most successful colonists here – were Chinese and other Asians, then it was only appropriate that the colonial authorities showered these wealthy Asian elites with imperial honours – appointments as Legislative Councillors, Municipal Commissioners, Justices of the Peace, and Magistrates, as well as a sprinkling of conferrals of orders of chivalry and knighthoods. These Asian elites were some of the most prominent builders of the Empire.

#### **Non-European Aspects of European Colonialism**

So-called *European* colonialism here was really a cosmopolitan joint enterprise, established under a European flag yet carried out by and for Asian elites as well as their European fellow elites. Carl Trocki has explained that colonial Singapore represented a joint venture and partnership between leading Asians and Europeans.<sup>141</sup> The colonial system here was not only an example of Western colonisation – it was, in fact, at least as much an example of Asian colonisation, and most especially a case of highly successful Chinese colonisation.<sup>142</sup> Though the Nanyang region was politically and administratively controlled by Europeans during the colonial era, the Nanyang Chinese were, economically and demographically, far more important colonists here than their

---

<sup>141</sup> Carl A. Trocki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control*, pp. 76, 77, and 182.

<sup>142</sup> See the mention of the history of Chinese overseas colonisation with regard to Singapore, in: Jiann Hsieh, “Internal Structure and Socio-Cultural Change: A Chinese Case in the Multi-Ethnic Society of Singapore,” PhD Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1977, p. 6.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

European fellow elites. While Singapore was *politically* within the British Empire, in *economic* terms, Singapore may well have been as much a colonial Settlement of China as it was of the British Empire, since the flow of remittances from Chinese people in Singapore and the rest of the Nanyang made a significant contribution to the Chinese economy.<sup>143</sup> The Nanyang provided hard-working Chinese with a host of ample opportunities for economic achievement, and their headquarters in the Western Nanyang was at Singapore, the economic centre of this region.<sup>144</sup>

Nanyang Chinese businessmen found that they could build their business empires under the protection of the Union Jack in cooperation with Europeans and others, and along the way, the Chinese businessmen established their status as leaders and associated with elites of other races. Asian and European elites benefited jointly in terms of social and symbolic capital, as well as material wealth. The vast wealth and social status achieved by the leading Chinese capitalists and other Asian businessmen indicated the extent to which the colonial system was built by these Asians, rather than just by Europeans. To describe the colonial system as purely *European* colonialism would be to deny Asian elites the acknowledgement they deserve for their profound contribution to the development of this colonial port city and its Malayan hinterland, which in turn provided them with opportunities for achievement, to succeed both economically and symbolically. *Officially*, the ultimate political control of this colonial system was in the hands of British officials in London; but, in reality, much of the decision-making was

---

<sup>143</sup> Wu Chun-hsi, *Dollars Dependents and Dogma: Overseas Chinese Remittances to Communist China*, p. 162. See also: John Drysdale, *Singapore: Struggle for Success*, p. 62; and: Yoji Akashi, *The Nanyang Chinese National Salvation Movement, 1937-1941*, pp. 129 and 159.

<sup>144</sup> On Singapore as the *centre* and *headquarters* of Chinese in the Western Nanyang, see: Wang Gungwu, "A Short History of the Nanyang Chinese," in: Wang Gungwu, *Community and Nation: China, Southeast Asia and Australia*, p. 23.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

done by officials in Singapore, and local Asian elites enjoyed access to these officials, by virtue of their seats on the Legislative Council, the Municipal Commission, and the Advisory Boards, as well as their attendance at social functions at Government House. Whoever was officially in charge of the colonial system, the fact remained that the laws and policies that were enacted and enforced by this system clearly served the interests of Asian business elites.

### **Evaluating the Public Lives of Colonial Elites**

How do we evaluate the documentary evidence of the public representation of Asian and European colonial elites? During their lifetimes, many of these elites were praised for their public services and their charitable activities. Some of them were praised for standing up to the colonial governmental authorities on behalf of certain sections of the population and various interest groups. Some accounts written in the post-colonial era engage in similar exercises in praising colonial-era elites for their philanthropy and their leadership in standing up to the colonial system; in this sense, post-colonial accounts basically follow in the footsteps of colonial-era hagiography of elites. Indeed, one way to approach the colonial past is to write historical accounts which document (or celebrate) the public-spirited activities of community leaders (either Asian or European) over time, especially their struggles to demand certain reforms or concessions from the colonial state. Such accounts could portray these activist elites as principled and heroic champions of progress and the public good – or, at least, the public good as they perceived it. To write of the past in this way might attempt to offer a view of Singapore's colonial history as a long journey towards democracy, a story of progress against the backdrop of the tension between authoritarian and liberalising tendencies, in

### *Conclusions and Implications*

contrast to a story about the continuity of the successful partnership between different types of colonial elites – Asian and European, official and private-sector. To focus upon the public-spirited activities and struggles of private-sector elites, rather than their efforts to sustain and enhance their own economic and symbolic capital through cooperation with one another, would be to present an heroic image of these elites as selfless community leaders who are worthy of our unqualified respect and admiration.

How, then, should we react to such hagiography? Was colonial Singapore all about private-sector elites confronting the colonial state and demanding change and progress? Should we respond credulously, accepting uncritically the idealised images of the leading members of the various communities in colonial Singapore, as selfless public benefactors and heroic community leaders devoted to civic duty, who dared to stand up to the colonial state on behalf of their constituencies? Or, should we react cynically, noting that, while some of these elites may have complained loudly about various aspects of the colonial system, they nevertheless continued to participate in this system, and were, in fact, some of its leading beneficiaries? However certain private-sector elites may have complained from time to time, the fact remains that they and their institutions remained firmly in position at the top of the colonial society, with a smooth pattern of succession from one generation of elites to another.

Perhaps the answer is that we should be neither completely credulous nor completely cynical, since the activities of these elites were likely neither completely self-serving nor completely selfless. These elites may have been quite genuine in their commitment to public service, whether through philanthropy or through public activism. Nevertheless, their public-spirited activities – no matter how genuine – also served their



### *Conclusions and Implications*

own interests. Their charitable activities enhanced their public reputations and prestige, as well as their images as leaders of their communities, while their public service as public spokesmen and the leaders of organisations objectified their social status and rank. Asian elites were just as much the insiders and stakeholders of the colonial system as were their Western fellow elites, and together they derived economic and symbolic capital. Whatever criticisms they may have voiced about the colonial system, the fact remains that the Asian and European elites alike were deeply incorporated into that system. By their continued participation in this system, they enjoyed its material and symbolic benefits, and contributed to its efficiency, its viability, and its legitimacy. This is not to deny the genuine public spirit of leading elites, their charitable generosity, political activism, commitment to principles, and even altruism; but the fact remains that, at the end of the day, *all* of the colonial elites were partners in the colonial system – Asian elites as well as Europeans, private-sector elites as well as colonial officials.

Any balanced account must grant these generous public benefactors the credit they deserve for devoting so much of their time, energy, and wealth to the public good; however, the emphasis in this study is on the *social function* of the public service activities of elites – rather than whatever their *intentions* may have been. Whether they were motivated by selfless altruism or self-interested calculation, or some mixture of the two, is not of concern to this study. The elites no doubt accomplished a great deal of benefit to the public by their philanthropic endeavours, their generous charitable donations, and their public services as community leaders. These facts cannot and should not be denied. Still, the fact remains that these public-spirited activities also clearly served the social and symbolic interests of these elites, whether or not this was intentional

### *Conclusions and Implications*

on their part. The publicity and conspicuousness of their contributions to the public interest ensured that they would receive public honour and social recognition, thus confirming and enhancing their elite status, and contributing to their social prominence and symbolic capital. Whether or not there was an element of self-interested *calculation* involved in such charity and public service does not alter the fact that their public activities *functioned* to provide social and symbolic benefits to those elites, who were publicly regarded as charitable benefactors and community leaders. Charity and public service simultaneously served the benefactors themselves, as well as the public. Altruism and self-serving social ambition could go hand in hand.

Examples of criticism directed against the colonial political system by Asian and European private-sector elites must be put in proper perspective. Accounts which focus on the public-spirited activities of private-sector elites may be quite historically accurate, but such accounts might tend to overlook or obscure the extent to which such elites were actually partners and stakeholders in the colonial system which they sometimes criticised. Even when these private-sector elites criticised the colonial system, they still continued to enjoy its material and symbolic rewards, and they still continued to uphold the system as a whole – after all, it was *their* system, just as much as it belonged to the government or the bureaucracy. The different types of elites depended on one another and worked together to realise their material and symbolic goals and ambitions.

The big picture of Asian and European elite-level interaction was characterised by mutually-beneficial cooperation and partnership, despite occasional outbursts of complaints by certain elites. The Asian elites had at least as much of a stake in the colonial system as their Western partners, and these Asian elites knew that the colonial

## *Conclusions and Implications*

system benefited them, protecting their interests and providing them with rich rewards. They basked in the glory of their high social status and prestige, while enjoying lives of privilege and luxury; indeed, for most of the colonial era, they did not even have to pay income tax!<sup>145</sup> Colonial Singapore was truly a paradise for *wealthy* people, in which most of these wealthy people were evidently Chinese and other Asians.<sup>146</sup> The private-sector elites – including Asian and European economic and professional elites – were just as deeply incorporated into the colonial system as were their fellow elites, the colonial official elites; their interests were closely intertwined. Not surprisingly, the relationship between the private-sector and public-sector colonial elites was characterised more by cooperation than by confrontation. It was only natural for Asian elites in colonial Singapore to generally support the colonial system; indeed, it would have been hypocritical of them if they had not supported it, since it was their own system as much as it belonged to any Westerners.

### **Stakeholders in Colonialism**

In evaluating the complaints that were sometimes made against certain aspects of the colonial system by some elites, we must keep in mind the extent to which these elites were actually incorporated within that system. There is a limit to how much a person can really be opposed to a system of which that person is actually a leading stakeholder and

---

<sup>145</sup> Income tax was introduced in 1917, withdrawn in 1922, and re-introduced in 1941 and again in 1947. Regarding the income tax, see: *British Malaya* magazine, March 1937, p. 255, and September 1940, p. 70; Chiang Hai Ding, *A History of Straits Settlements Foreign Trade 1870-1915*, pp. 35-36; Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, p. 103; George Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, pp. 196-197; C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*, pp. 72, 114, 129, 153, 160, and 230.

<sup>146</sup> Regarding the wealth of the Chinese and other Asians in Singapore, see: Minute by Governor Robert Fullerton, dated 24<sup>th</sup> August 1829, published as extract number 154 in: C.D. Cowan, editor, “Early Penang & the Rise of Singapore 1805-1832: Documents from the manuscript records of the East India Company...” in the *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. XXIII, Pt. II, March 1950, p. 192 (I am grateful to Clement Liew for kindly bringing this extract to my attention); *Singapore Chronicle*, 1 July 1830, p. 3, R0009222; John Dill Ross, *The Capital of a Little Empire* (1898), p. 69; Ashley Gibson, *The Malay Peninsula and Archipelago*, (1928), p. 32; and: John H. MacCallum Scott, *Eastern Journey* (1939), p. 18.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

beneficiary, and so we should be sceptical of the extent to which any colonial elites really opposed the colonial system – it was, after all, the system which made them elites. The criticism of the colonial administration by private-sector elites may be compared to the criticism of the management of a company by some of its own shareholders: even though shareholders may have complaints about the management, or may demand that a larger share of the company's profits be paid out as dividends, this does not mean that they oppose the company per se, or want it to go out of business. Similarly, it would be difficult to believe that any colonial elites opposed the colonial system per se, although they might have wanted to see certain adjustments.<sup>147</sup>

Colonial elites could combine self-interest with devotion to the public good. They could be motivated by genuinely altruistic sentiments, by playing the roles of generous, charitable public benefactors, as well as principled leaders who stood up to the colonial state on certain issues. At the same time, they could also look out for their own interests as socially ambitious individuals and as members of an elite class who were partners and stakeholders in the colonial order and who naturally wished to preserve the *status quo* that was so clearly beneficial to their own interests. There is no real contradiction between these two different public roles, that is, between the roles of public-spirited leaders and benefactors on the one hand, and ambitious stakeholders in the colonial economic and symbolic systems on the other. Indeed, the two types of roles were actually complementary. It was the economic success of elites of various races within the colonial system which allowed them to play the roles of generous public benefactors and philanthropists, of sponsors of education and donors to various charitable causes; without their wealth, they could not have become noted for their charity.

---

<sup>147</sup> Carl A. Trocki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control*, p. 76, 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

Likewise, it was their prominent status as local elites which gave them the social standing or platform from which to voice criticisms of certain aspects of the colonial system, on behalf of various sections of the population. The fact that they were members of the multiracial elite class, and successful partners and stakeholders in the colonial system, allowed them the opportunities to play the roles of philanthropists and community leaders.<sup>148</sup>

Meanwhile, the complementary relationship also operated in the opposite direction, with apparently altruistic activities serving both the personal and class interests of elites. On an individual level, their high-profile public-spirited activities and their acceptance of the responsibilities of community leadership served to enhance their prestige and confirm their membership in the elite class, and could potentially elevate their standing *within* the elite class, relative to their fellow elites. Simultaneously, at the collective level of the entire elite class, the sum total of the public-spirited activities of the elites helped to legitimise the location of their elite class and its institutions at the centre of the society, by demonstrating that the members of this class took leading roles in public service. This might be described as an element of meritocracy in the legitimation of the social status and prestige of the elite class, but it was a form of meritocracy in which an individual could prove his merit after the fact, so to speak – that is, an ambitious individual could become wealthy by inheritance or personal achievement, and socially integrate into the elite class and its system of status symbols,

---

<sup>148</sup> Gabriel Almond noted the complex motives of elite philanthropy; see: Gabriel A. Almond, *Plutocracy and Politics in New York City*, p. 107; see also: pp. 79-80, 81, 188, 189, and: Harvey Warren Zorbaugh, *The Gold Coast and the Slum*, pp. 51-53; Henry J. Lethbridge, “Hong Kong Under Japanese Occupation: Changes in Social Structure,” in: I.C. Jarvie, editor, in consultation with Joseph Agassi, *Hong Kong: A Society in Transition*, pp. 84-86; Elizabeth Sinn, *Power and Charity: A Chinese Merchant Elite in Colonial Hong Kong*, “Preface to the Paperback Edition” (2003), p. xviii; and: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, pp. xvi, 8, 11-13, 19, 25, 110-111, 129-131, 139-141.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

and *then* prove his social merit and worth after the fact, by engaging in public-spirited activities which asserted his moral right to be regarded by the public as a community leader.

### **Respected Community Leaders**

The public-spirited activities of individual elites had the collective effect of demonstrating that their class deserved its place at the top of the social structure, in the centre of colonial society, and that its members deserved to be *respected* by the public, rather than merely envied for their possession of economic and symbolic capital. Meritorious activities for the public good legitimated the social prominence and dominance of the elite class.<sup>149</sup> Their involvement in charitable activities and other public affairs no doubt enhanced their own personal sense of importance to their society, as well as their perceived importance in the eyes of the public.

One of the implications of an appreciation of the cooperative and interdependent nature of elite-level colonial interactions is that the public statements of and about Asian and European colonial elites should be put in perspective, especially altruistic and moralistic statements – for example, statements which portrayed these elites unproblematically as generous public benefactors and principled leaders who stood up to the colonial authorities. If we are sceptical today about the claims made by European colonial elites that their colonial and imperial endeavours were all part of a civilising mission that was carried out for the benefit and improvement of non-European peoples, we should be equally cautious about accepting any statements made by Asian colonial elites and their admirers, to the effect that these non-European colonial elites completely

---

<sup>149</sup> Linda Colley has discussed the relationship between meritocracy and the British elite; see: Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (1992), pp. 190-193.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

took the side of the Asian masses against the colonial system, and heroically championed the interests of the Asian population. Of course, it would be easy to cynically dismiss such statements as self-serving, as may now be done with regard to such statements made by the European colonial elites. Altruistic statements made by wealthy and privileged Asian colonial elites could also be dismissed just as cynically, though perhaps there might be a tendency nowadays to respond to such statements by Asian elites with more credulity than altruistic expressions made by their European colonial fellow elites.

The presentation by colonial elites of such altruistic and moralistic images for public consumption would naturally tend to justify and legitimate the social position and authority of these elites, Asian as well as Western. Still, while maintaining a sceptical attitude toward public expressions of altruism, we should not assume that these elites did not really mean what they said. Asian and European colonial elites alike may have sincerely believed that they were looking out for the interests of the Asian masses, according to their own standards. The public-spirited activities of Asian and European colonial elites may have improved the living conditions of the masses, in so far as this was possible within the framework of the colonial system, as well as helping these elites to feel good about themselves while they enjoyed their colonial privileges, their rich rewards of wealth and status. Nevertheless, these elites were *insiders* within the colonial system, and Asian elites were as much insiders as were their European fellow elites. They were all working within this system, and whatever efforts they made on behalf of non-elites, the overall picture of the interactions among Asian and European elites was still characterised by cooperation for the sake of the interests of the members of this multiracial elite class. Even their efforts to make reforms and improve the living

### *Conclusions and Implications*

conditions of the masses may be seen as a component of elite-level cooperation in sustaining and perpetuating the colonial system from which these elites derived their privileges of wealth and status, since such efforts on behalf of the masses would tend to reduce social tensions somewhat, and to legitimate the colonial system, its social structure, and the position and authority of its Asian and European elites.

While the public expressions of altruism by colonial elites should be treated with caution and even, perhaps, a degree of scepticism, this study does not attempt a final moral judgement of the colonial system. For all its faults, it is not clear what better alternative there was to the colonial system at the time; rule by wholly Asian elites may have been no better for the masses – indeed, the majority of immigrants to colonial Singapore flocked from China, a country under Asian elite rule, where these working-class immigrants had evidently suffered under even worse conditions than the harsh working conditions and low standard of living which they found upon arrival in colonial Singapore. That is to say, by *our* standards of today, the living and working conditions of labourers in colonial Singapore were appalling; but, by *their* standards, they evidently regarded these conditions to be better than what they had known in China.

### **Depictions of Colonialism**

Post-colonial-era historians and others, imbued with a belief in the merits of nationalism, may be tempted to depict the colonial era in the most negative light possible, while minimising or overlooking the cooperative involvement of Asian elites in colonial polities. By painting the bleakest or darkest picture possible of the colonial era, and most especially by emphasising inequality, racism, and conflict along racial lines, such depictions of the colonial era would make the post-colonial situation look all that much



### *Conclusions and Implications*

brighter by contrast. (This despite the fact that inequality, racism, and racial strife are by no means unknown in the post-colonial world; indeed, in some post-colonial countries, the amount of racial and ethnic strife, as measured by the body count, may already be far greater than during the colonial past.) Naturally, the effort to depict the colonial era in an overly negative light would lead to a tendency to downplay the complicity of Asian elites in these demonised systems, since these elites and their descendants may have continued to be socially, economically, and politically prominent after independence. Such elites could be expected to prefer to disassociate themselves or their ancestors from the central roles they played in the colonial system. Perhaps this helps to explain why there has been surprisingly little attention given to the social and symbolic connections between Asian and European colonial elites, considering the importance of their cooperation to the colonial system; this might also help to explain why there has been a tendency to accept Furnivall's allegation of colonial-era social segregation and compartmentalisation along racial lines.

In the twentieth century, some writers may have been inclined to stress the differences between nationalism and colonialism as systems of power, emphasising their contrasts, while glorifying nationalism and demonising colonialism. Of course, the two systems are (or were) different: imperialists sometimes claimed that they had the right to rule over other peoples because they were racially or culturally superior to them,<sup>150</sup> while nationalism has often involved the highlighting of ethnic, religious, and racial identities, and nationalist emphasis on such collective identities has led to atrocities, including

---

<sup>150</sup> Ian Copland, *The Burden of Empire: Perspectives on Imperialism and Colonialism*, pp. 35 and 37; Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, pp. 280-283; James Morris, *Pax Britannica: The Climax of an Empire*, p. 132; Henry Norman, *The Peoples and Politics of The Far East: Travels and Studies in the British, French, Spanish and Portuguese Colonies, Siberia, China, Japan, Korea, Siam and Malaya*, p. 601.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

ethnic cleansing and warfare, which have resulted in the violent deaths of millions of people.<sup>151</sup> Indeed, nationalism seems to be particularly well suited to a high degree of mobilisation of populations for total warfare, thus magnifying the scale and intensity of the carnage of modern warfare and making civilians and their workplaces into military targets. While colonial rulers might assure their people that they did not need to mobilise because they would be protected by imperial naval and military forces, national leaders often expect maximum mobilisation of their people in wartime.

The nationalistic emphasis on collective identities has meant that nationalist leaders and intellectuals can make emotionally powerful appeals based on racial and ethnic identities; nationalist leaders can identify themselves with the majority ethnic group and declare themselves to be on the side of *the people*, as opposed to outsiders, such as minority groups and foreigners. Such emotionally-powerful appeals were unavailable to the rulers of colonial polities, since these rulers often belonged to identities which were different from those of the people they ruled. Nationalism has the ability to take on a quasi-religious aura, which can appeal to the masses in a way that would be difficult or impossible for colonialism to have accomplished to the same degree. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, people fought, killed, and died for their nations, in much the same way that, in earlier centuries, people had killed and died for their religions, and for their supposedly divinely-ordained kings.<sup>152</sup> Nationalism confers a kind of sanctity upon the nation-state; while people may oppose their government, they cannot oppose their *nation* in the way that the population of a colony might oppose

---

<sup>151</sup> See the reference to collective identities in contemporary societies in: David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*, p. 126.

<sup>152</sup> See the mention of religious and nationalist justifications for war, in: E.H. Carr, *What Is History?* p. 18.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

colonialism, since nationalist ideology envisions the *nation* as an entity which includes the people, as well as the polity; so, for people to oppose their own nation, they would have to oppose themselves.

Nationalism, then, may be seen as an inherently stronger ideology for unity than colonialism or imperialism; people may be able to feel stronger emotional bonds as fellow citizens of a nation-state, than as fellow colonial subjects of an empire. The emotional power of the cult of nationalism may bind together an entire population with a sense of national community. However, this same emotional strength in the sense of unity through the nationalistic emphasis of shared identity may promote intolerance and demands for conformity, and make it more difficult for people to tolerate or accept others of different identities, and to see past these differences and work together.<sup>153</sup> Nationalism may even actively promote intolerance and an ideology of racial or ethnic superiority and inferiority, which can then be used to justify atrocities – as most infamously in the case of the nationalism of Nazi Germany and imperial Japan.

The differences in the stated objectives of colonial elites versus national elites might lead to the conclusion that the activities of these two types of elites were fundamentally different.<sup>154</sup> However, if we can accept that both of these types of elites were basically concerned about the same goals, especially the acquisition and holding of power in various forms (including wealth and prestige; political, economic, social, and symbolic capital), then we can appreciate the fact that the concepts of colonialism and nationalism are not so different after all: they are merely different forms of the same social and political phenomena of the dynamics of stratification, inequality, and oligarchy

---

<sup>153</sup> Again, see: David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*, p. 126.

<sup>154</sup> See: Takashi Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan*, p. 100.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

– of the concentration of power over the multitudes, and other rewards, in the hands of a privileged few.<sup>155</sup> These tendencies are seen in many, if not all, societies and centuries. Seen in this light, the basic dynamics of colonialism and nationalism as systems of power are the same: elites working to gain (and to keep) power over populations, territory, and wealth, as well as the prestige which accompanies and sustains that power; and elites striving to convince the masses to accept elite power, privilege, and prestige, as legitimate, authoritative, and natural. The excitement surrounding the postcolonial nationalist movements in the second half of the twentieth century, and the bright hopes for the future progress of these glorious new nation-states, gave intellectuals of the former colonial territories good reason to celebrate nationalism and to distance the new nationalist systems of power from their colonial predecessors; and Western intellectuals may have been attracted to take the politically-correct path of jumping on the nationalist bandwagon, to show that they, too, were on the side of the new postcolonial nationalism, and that they had nothing to do with the bad, old colonialism.

### **How Different were Colonial States from Nation-States?**

Perhaps now, from the vantage point of the twenty-first century, we are in a better position to see that colonialism and nationalism were, after all, not quite so different as was once imagined. Now that the new postcolonial nation-states in various regions of the world have experienced several generations of political leadership, perhaps we can better appreciate the degree to which basic similarities between colonial and postcolonial polities and societies still persist – the names of rulers and institutions may change, but the underlying structures of political power, as well as social status and prestige, may yet

---

<sup>155</sup> See: Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*, p. 377.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

demonstrate remarkable elements of continuity over time. Moreover, we may perceive an even wider continuity on a global scale, in terms of the nature and composition of the global elite class; if we accept that the colonial elite class included non-Western elites as well as their European fellow elites, then we can see that there has been a great deal of continuity from the multiracial colonial-era elite class to the multiracial international elite class of the globalised world of the twenty-first century.

It may be especially timely to consider the elements of historical continuity now, in the early twenty-first century, when most of the nation-states that were once colonial lands are largely inhabited by people who grew up after their countries had moved beyond their colonial eras. Carl Trocki has asserted that there are themes of historical continuity in Singapore.<sup>156</sup> Themes of historical continuity from the colonial era to the present day are likely to be found in many formerly colonial lands.

There are remarkable similarities between various post-colonial nation-states and the colonial states which they succeeded, despite all the emotionally-charged nationalist rhetoric to the contrary. The same sorts of structures of power and privilege that were the order of the day in the colonial era – the inequalities of social, political, and economic power and status, and the institutions which legitimated and perpetuated the privileged position of generations of elites in these terms – are as characteristic of nation-states as of colonial states. In formerly colonial lands, these characteristics may march on into the future, now under the banners of nationalism and globalisation, rather than colonialism and imperialism. To put it another way, what was described as the so-called civilising mission of imperialism and colonialism has been replaced by the nationalising and globalising missions of the post-colonial era. The difference between the colonial era and

---

<sup>156</sup> Carl A. Trocki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control*, pp. 77, 181, 185.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

the postcolonial era may be seen, in some senses at least, as a matter of peeling off one set of labels, and sticking on another set of labels – in other words, a re-branding exercise. But the social and political value of these nationalist-era labels must not be underestimated. Labels are symbols, and, like any form of symbolic capital, they can be very important to many people, motivating them to strive and to sacrifice in order to gain and protect the symbols that they cherish.

### **The Continuity of the Prominence of Asian Elites**

If we conclude that Asian elites were actually at the centre of the so-called European colonialism, together with their European fellow elites, and that Asian elites and European elites alike belonged to the colonial elite class, then (following the lead of David Cannadine and his book *Ornamentalism*)<sup>157</sup> we can see that the distinctions of status and prestige were at least as important in the colonial era, if not more important, than distinctions of race. This calls into question any tendency to assume that the political, economic, and social characteristics of colonial society were unilaterally imposed by European colonial elites, and suggests that the so-called Western imperialism was actually accomplished through the cooperation of a multiracial and transcontinental elite class. Moreover, if we accept that the transition from the colonial era to the post-colonial era has been largely about changes in the symbolic realm of labels and emotions, while the governmental and social structures of power have shown a remarkable degree of continuity, with many elite families maintaining their privileged positions, then we may realise the development of the so-called Western global capitalist system – a process which began in the colonial era and has continued throughout the post-colonial era – has

---

<sup>157</sup> See: David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*, p. 172.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

not been exclusively Western at all, but has instead been accomplished by the multiracial and multinational members of a cosmopolitan elite class.

If the transition from colonialism to nationalism did not necessarily result in a significant change in the social structure, the distinctions of economic and symbolic capital within populations, or the identities of the individuals and families who enjoyed the largest shares of economic and symbolic capital, then what were the real difference between colonialism and nationalism, if any? Perhaps a crucial difference between colonialism and post-colonial nationalism was really in the symbolic realm, in the belief or hope that the new political order would allow the non-European population to participate in the symbolic order to a greater extent than they could under colonialism, by permitting them to enjoy the emotional satisfaction of a sense of inclusion in an independent and assertive national community. It seems obvious that people could naturally take more pride in their country if it was an independent nation-state, than they could if their country was merely a colony subordinated to an imperial power, and that people are more likely to feel some sense of identification with their own national leaders who share their own cultural identity, than with imperial rulers who belong to another culture. For example, even if the non-European residents of a colony were to take pride in the monarchy and other symbols of the empire to which their colony belonged, could they ever feel as much pride in these symbols as could the European citizens of that imperial homeland, who could identify with these symbols on a deeper level, as the emblems of their own culture and nationality? No matter how much a colonial administration promoted legal equality for its subjects and respect for their cultures, those

### *Conclusions and Implications*

who were lacked nation-states to call their own could always feel a sense of relative symbolic deprivation.

Seeing the pride that, for example, many Europeans and Japanese took in their homelands and national symbols, it would be only natural for people who were not citizens of independent countries to desire their own nation-states and national symbols, and to assert the equality of their nations with all others. Moreover, it seems likely that the desire to bring about the rise of post-colonial nationalism would have been most intense among those members of any colonial society who had little or no stake in its economic and symbolic rewards – in other words, the non-elites, or perhaps even some people from elite backgrounds who felt that they deserved even more rewards, and that they could accomplish their goals by becoming the leaders of nationalist movements. Meanwhile, regarding the most privileged Asian elites, who enjoyed great symbolic benefits of status and prestige under the colonial system, post-colonial nationalism may have been somewhat less attractive – though, of course, once these elites realised that independence was definitely going to happen, then they would have every reason to quickly switch their allegiance to the nationalist movement, and to strive to sustain their privileged position by gaining a leading role in the new order. To the extent that the elites succeeded in this endeavour of preserving their social position in the new system and their influence in the new national government by becoming ardent converts to nationalism and anti-colonialism, then the new order was really not so new after all. However, a different picture may emerge if we consider the emotional and symbolic issues involved in the change from the colonial era to the post-colonial era.



## *Conclusions and Implications*

The transition from colonialism to nationalism may have been not so much about changes in the social and governmental structures – which may, indeed, have demonstrated remarkable degrees of continuity; instead, the transition apparently involved important symbolic and emotional developments, which were likely to have been profoundly significant to many people in these lands. The importance of these issues can be realised if we accept that symbolic rewards tend to be at least as important as material things to many people. The deep appreciation of the value of symbolic resources was, of course, something which Asian and European elites shared in colonial Singapore, and this explains how their cooperation in creating, exchanging, and partaking together in such resources of symbolic capital cultivated the social linkages which integrated them into a cosmopolitan elite community of prestige. It may be argued that the advent of post-colonial nationalism allowed the masses of these new nation-states to experience a sense of inclusion in a *mass-level* community of *national* prestige, as the entire citizenries of these newly independent countries could share in the enjoyment of national pride. Patriotism can potentially involve an emotional intensity which may be comparable to religious fervour, and patriotic citizens may feel that they share in the prestige of their nation-states. The concept of a community of prestige need not be limited to the social integration of elites.

### **Recognition of the Crucial Role of Asian Colonial Elites**

This study did not set out to pass judgement on the colonial system – that is, to determine whether it was good or bad on balance; such value judgements are left to the readers to make for themselves.<sup>158</sup> Such an evaluation would be difficult because it

---

<sup>158</sup> John Bastin, *The Study of Modern Southeast Asian History: An Inaugural Lecture delivered in the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur on 14 December 1959*, p. 16.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

would seem that there is no clearly superior alternative to colonialism; certainly, the histories of both pre-colonial traditional polities and postcolonial nation-states offer too many examples of tragedies, tyrannies, and atrocities for them to be accepted as obviously better systems of power than colonialism. Human nature being what it is, it is likely that all political and social systems will produce inequalities between privileged elites and the rest of the population. Individual examples may be selected of postcolonial-era tyrants, as well as the body counts of their subjects who died under their regimes; and these examples could be highlighted to make Western colonialism in Asia look benevolent by comparison. Alternatively, examples of the negative aspects of colonialism, such as political and economic inequalities and racial policies, could be selectively highlighted to depict the darkest-possible image of colonialism, especially by contrasting these examples with the supposedly happier conditions in postcolonial nation-states. However, it is not the purpose of this study to praise or to condemn either colonialism or nationalism. This study has concentrated instead on an exploration of how and why Asian and European elites in one colonial setting cooperated in creating and sustaining the social cohesion of their elite class.

Leading Chinese businessmen and professionals and other Asian business and professional elites must be given ample recognition for their crucial role in the development of the colonial system in Singapore and its Malayan hinterland, as well as for their accomplishments in the areas of community leadership and philanthropy. The development of colonial-era Singapore and Malaya belonged to the Asian colonial elites as well as the European elites, and all of these elites shared in the material and symbolic rewards of the colonial system, thereby providing them with powerful motivations for

## *Conclusions and Implications*

their continued cooperation throughout the colonial era. Whatever else may be said about the pros and cons of colonialism, it certainly served the interests of these Asian and European elites. Considering the relatively small number of Europeans who settled in colonial Singapore and its Malayan hinterland, it is clear that these Europeans needed to find Asian partners in their colonial venture; and in order for such partnership to last, it would have to provide mutual benefits. The social and symbolic dimensions of the colonial system provided a range of non-material yet highly-valued rewards to the partners, as well as fostering the elite-level social integration which could facilitate the ongoing partnership. The nature of colonialism required a system which could incorporate and integrate both Asian elite and European elites, and allow for the cultivation and strengthening of the connections with linked them to each other and to the system itself.

### **Inequality of Rewards within the Colonial System**

Asian and European elites thrived in colonial Singapore, enjoying a freedom from income taxes during most of the colonial era,<sup>159</sup> living in spacious mansions and engaging in a range of social and recreational activities. However, colonial Singapore was certainly not a paradise or utopia for everyone. The negative aspects of the system included the vast economic inequalities and the deplorable living conditions of poor workers, many of whom were also the consumers in the opium trade, which provided the colonial state with its major source of revenue and also enriched Chinese opium merchants. By 1848, approximately one-third of the Chinese adults in Singapore may

---

<sup>159</sup> Income tax was introduced in 1917, withdrawn in 1922, and re-introduced in 1941 and again in 1947. Regarding the income tax, see: *British Malaya* magazine, March 1937, p. 255, and September 1940, p. 70; Chiang Hai Ding, *A History of Straits Settlements Foreign Trade 1870-1915*, pp. 35-36; Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, p. 103; George Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, pp. 196-197; C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*, pp. 72, 114, 129, 153, 160, and 230.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

have been opium addicts.<sup>160</sup> Another negative aspect of the colonial system was the colour bar, which restricted the entry of qualified non-Malay Asians into the colonial civil service.<sup>161</sup> But whether colonialism in Singapore is viewed as good or bad, the Asian elites here must not be left out of the story – the colonial system could not have developed as it did without them. During World War One, Dr. Lim Boon Keng, who was a strong and vocal critic of the colour bar policy, nevertheless praised the greatness of the Empire and pointed out that the Empire was the result of the cooperation of the many peoples of different races who were the loyal subjects of the King-Emperor.<sup>162</sup>

Regarding the *colour bar* policy in colonial-era Malaya, it was, perhaps, unlikely that Asian business elites were inconvenienced in their business endeavours by this policy of restricting the access of non-Malays to official positions in the colonial bureaucracy, which was introduced on a Malaya-wide basis in 1904. The official explanation was that this policy was instituted to satisfy Malay elites who objected to non-Malay officials in the Malay States, and as the colonial bureaucracy of the Straits Settlements and the Malay States was progressively centralised and unified, the colour bar policy applied to Malaya as a whole, including the Straits Settlements.<sup>163</sup> Over time,

---

<sup>160</sup> Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, p. 222.

<sup>161</sup> Regarding the colour bar policy, see: John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, pp. 96, 97, 107-112, 120, 122, and 175-179; Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 480; Lim Boon Keng, "Race and Empire with special reference to British Malaya," in: Lim Boon Keng, *The Great War from The Confucian Point of View*, pp. 101-114; Sir George Maxwell, "The Mixed Communities of Malaya" *British Malaya* (magazine), February 1943, pp. 117-118; a letter from Sir George Maxwell to the editor of *Malaya* magazine, published under the heading "Politics in Malaya" in: *Malaya*, March 1952, p. 26; and: K.G. Tregonning, "Tan Cheng Lock: A Malayan Nationalist," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Volume X, Number 1 (March 1979), p. 29.

<sup>162</sup> Lim Boon Keng, "Race and Empire with special reference to British Malaya," in: Lim Boon Keng, *The Great War from The Confucian Point of View*, pp. 114-115.

<sup>163</sup> Regarding the colour bar, see: John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia*, pp. 96, 97, 107-112, 122, and 176. Yeo Kim Wah, *Political Development in Singapore 1945-55* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1973), p. 10.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

some Malays were recruited as officials of the colonial state, in the Malay Administrative Service and the Malayan Civil Service.<sup>164</sup>

The colour bar policy was clearly insulting to Asians in the early decades of the twentieth century; it was particularly insulting to those Asians who were directly affected: the English-educated Chinese, Eurasian, and Indian professional elites who graduated from the English-medium schools which developed within the colonial system, including Raffles Institution, the elite school which took pride in its foundation by Sir Stamford Raffles, and which educated so many Asian elites, including Dr. Lim Boon Keng, Sir Ong Siang Song, Dr. Noel Clarke, and Sir Cheng Lock Tan. The colour bar policy went against the spirit of the principles expounded by Raffles in the first few years of the history of the Settlement, principles which Asian and European elites subsequently consecrated as the tradition and heritage of colonial Singapore – principles such as respect for the rights of all regardless of their race, legal equality for Asians and Europeans alike,<sup>165</sup> the welcoming of Chinese and other immigrants, and the encouragement of Western-style English-language education for Asians (especially elite Asians).<sup>166</sup> The Raffles tradition – fashioned, elaborated, and expounded by generations of Asian and European elites, based on their selective citation of the recorded words of Raffles – was imbued with a spirit of progress, improvement, enlightenment, and meritocracy. It was a tradition which embraced the promise of opportunities for

---

<sup>164</sup> Butcher, pp. 108 and 175.

<sup>165</sup> Regarding the principle of legal equality, see: Sir Stamford Raffles, “Minute by the Lieutenant Governor,” in a Proclamation dated 6 June 1823, in: Lady Raffles, *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles*, Appendix, p. 71. Also quoted in: Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 115.

<sup>166</sup> See: Sir Stamford Raffles, “Minutes by Sir T.S. Raffles, On The Establishment of a Malay College at Singapore. 1819.” In: Lady Raffles, *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles*, Appendix, pp. 23-38. See also: G.G. Hough, “Notes on the Educational Policy of Sir Stamford Raffles,” *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume XI, Part II (December 1933), pp. 166-170.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

achievement and success for immigrants of all races, and which legitimated the financial and symbolic ascendance of Asian and European elites, and their location in the centre of the colonial society, as the just rewards for their abilities and accomplishments.

It might be suggested that the Asian elites accepted the *status quo*, including its negative aspects (such as the colour bar), simply because there was nothing they could do to change it. However, is it correct to say that there was nothing that they could do about it, if they were really serious about taking some kind of action? For example, they could have followed the example of Mahatma Gandhi, and launched non-violent protests against the colonial system, including public demonstrations and refusal to participate in the economic, political, and symbolic dimensions of the colonial system. Asian elites could have renounced their imperial honours, and refused to accept any future honours.<sup>167</sup> Local history also provided examples of forms of protest which could be taken by elites. In 1895, the Asian and European private-sector elites resigned their appointments as Legislative Councillors, Justices of the Peace, and (in the case of local Chinese elites) their seats on the Singapore Chinese Advisory Board, in protest against the imperial government's assessment of how much revenue the Straits Settlements should contribute toward its own defence. The protestors against the military contribution held a public protest meeting at the Town Hall on 11 January 1895, at which Dr. Lim Boon Keng spoke, quoting Mencius to support his cause. This meeting followed the example of an earlier public protest meeting, held in the Town Hall on 18 March 1891, at which Tan

---

<sup>167</sup> See: Bernard S. Cohn, "Representing Authority in Victorian India," in: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, editors, *The Invention of Tradition*, p. 209; also in: Bernard S. Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays*, p. 678.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

Keong Saik objected to a demand of the imperial government that the Straits Settlements should contribute £100,000 for defence.<sup>168</sup>

These public protests and resignations demonstrated that the colonial system allowed Asian elites to participate in demonstrations of protest against colonial policies. These protests were well known, and both of them were chronicled in Sir Ong Siang Song's *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, which was published in 1923. Asian elites could have followed these precedents to launch protests against the colour bar policy, had they been so inclined. Yet, the protests against the military contribution in 1891 and 1895 seem to have been the exceptions that prove the rule: generally speaking, Asian elites seem to have willingly cooperated with the colonial and imperial system in which they were major stakeholders and beneficiaries. Despite their reasonable displeasure over the colour bar policy, it would seem that Asian elites realised that they were ultimately on the side the system, and that it was *their* system.

Perhaps the colour bar was an exception which proved the general rule: that the colonial system generally treated the elites of different races equally, providing them with equal opportunities for advancement, and attracting their cooperation, support, and inclusion. The very fact that some English-educated Asian elites were so understandably indignant about the insulting and unfair colour bar policy is an indication of the fact that it was exceptional; it was contrary to the principles of the colonial system which they upheld and to which they expressed their allegiance, principles which had been enunciated by Raffles in the early days of the Settlement. Asian elites took Raffles at his word, and celebrated his legacy; so it was quite natural for them to object robustly to a colour bar policy which clearly contradicted the spirit of the principle of equality before

---

<sup>168</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese*, pp. 261-262 and 283-284.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

the law, a principle which Raffles had established in Singapore by proclamation in 1823.<sup>169</sup> The indignation expressed by Asian elites over the colour bar policy in the early decades of the twentieth century was an indication of the exceptionality of such unfairness as far as the Asian elites were concerned; these Asian elites generally regarded the colonial system as usually relatively fair and beneficial to their interests, and so an aspect of this colonial system which was uncharacteristically unfair to Asian elites was a cause for protest.

The colour bar policy in the early decades of the twentieth century flew in the face of the Raffles tradition and insulted local English-educated professional elites. Yet, despite this negative aspect, the colonial system still attracted the cooperation of Asian elites with opportunities for gaining prestige and amassing enormous fortunes, while respecting their property rights as sacred, and shielding their assets – including the fabulous wealth and valuable properties of the leading Asian businessmen – from income taxes for most of the years of the colonial era. (Income tax was introduced in 1917, withdrawn in 1922, and re-introduced in 1941 and again in 1947.)<sup>170</sup> While the colonial system was not without its drawbacks for Asian professional elites, it was still, overall, a paradise for wealthy Asian businessmen, capitalists, and landowners. How many postcolonial nationalist governments have provided their businessmen and capitalists with an income-tax-free environment? Regardless of cultural factors, ethnic identities,

---

<sup>169</sup> Regarding the principle of legal equality, see: Sir Stamford Raffles, “Minute by the Lieutenant Governor,” in a Proclamation dated 6 June 1823, in: Lady Raffles, *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles*, Appendix, p. 71. Also quoted in: Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 115.

<sup>170</sup> Regarding income tax, see: Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, p. 103; Chiang Hai Ding, *A History of Straits Settlements Foreign Trade 1870-1915*, p. 35-36; C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore* (1989), pp. 72, 114, 129, 153, 160, 230; Bernard Nunn, “Some Account of Our Governors and Civil Service,” in: Makepeace et al., eds., *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume One, p. 142; George Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, p. 196; Sir Laurence Guillemard, *Trivial Fond Records*, pp. 96-97; *Straits Times* 26 December 1922, p. 9, R0016598.



### *Conclusions and Implications*

and political realities, what more could businessmen and capitalists anywhere ask for than a government which protects their property rights and provides them with a business-friendly environment, while sparing them from income taxes?

For Asian business and capitalist elites, the colonial system was more about the many benefits they enjoyed through cooperation, materially as well as symbolically, than it was about the negative aspects epitomised by the colour bar.<sup>171</sup> Asian elites may have had reason to complain about the political and symbolic aspects of the colonial system – for example, they may have desired more of a sense of inclusion and representation in the political process by means of political liberalisation and democratisation; but it is difficult to see what these wealthy and privileged Asian elites could have really had to complain about with regard to the local legal and economic systems, or their non-existent income-tax burden for most of the colonial era. Still, the importance of non-material, non-economic, and symbolic issues must not be underestimated. Satisfaction with economic conditions does not necessarily translate into complete satisfaction with the political and social situation. Issues of status, citizenship rights, political rights, representation in the political process, and democracy are very important issues to a great many people, and people can complain about what they see as their insufficient political rights and privileges even when their material standard of living is very high. Nationalist systems may have certain advantages over colonial and imperial systems, in terms of being able to address the emotional and symbolic needs of their citizens, by claiming that nationalist leaders are one and the same as their people, rather than foreign colonial rulers. A nationalist leader who is indigenous or local to his country may be able to successfully

---

<sup>171</sup> See the discussion of cooperation between Chinese and Europeans in: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, pp. 13-14, 15, 18, 289, 293, 294, 304, and 305; and of the colour bar policy on p. 301.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

claim a connection and a sympathy with his people in ways which a foreign colonial ruler could not – even if the nationalist leader enjoyed a privileged upbringing, education, and lifestyle that was very different from the experiences of the masses.

The really negative aspects of the colonial society and economy – the wretched living and working conditions of the impoverished Asian labourers, who were commonly known as *coolies* – probably did not directly affect their more fortunate fellow Asians, the wealthy Asian colonial elites who enjoyed income-tax-free lives of luxury in their sumptuous mansions. Indeed, some of the Asian elites were actually enriched by the misery of the labouring classes, since many of the coolie labourers were addicted to opium, and their addiction not only generated revenue for the colonial government, but also translated into enormous profits for wealthy local Chinese opium merchants.<sup>172</sup> The nature of life in colonial Singapore, as experienced by the Asian and European inhabitants of this place, was determined far more by *class* identity than by *racial* identity. There was all the difference in the world between the lifestyle of wealthy Asian and European inhabitants of colonial Singapore, versus the lifestyles of poor coolies and unemployed European sailors.

While the colour bar unfairly limited the career options of Chinese and other non-Malay Asian *professional* or *administrative* elites, this does not necessarily mean that it was a problem for Asian *business* elites. The career aspirations of Chinese businessmen were located in the realm of commerce, industry, and finance, rather than bureaucracy; and the social prestige of Chinese business leaders was measured by their prominence in the leadership of Chinese community organisations and in their fundraising for schools

---

<sup>172</sup> Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, pp. 222, 226, 227, 228, 230, 231, 233.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

and charitable funds,<sup>173</sup> by the honours they received from the British and Chinese governments, and by the conspicuous display of their personal wealth,<sup>174</sup> rather than through appointment to official positions in the colonial administration. Whatever restrictions that were imposed on non-Malay Asians in the civil service, Chinese and other Asian businessmen were free to pursue their economic objectives, which resulted in some of them achieving enormous wealth. The colour bar in the civil service certainly did not prevent Chinese capitalists from owning substantial shareholdings in the Straits Steamship Company<sup>175</sup> and the Straits Trading Company,<sup>176</sup> the companies which were responsible, respectively, for shipping tin ore to Singapore and for smelting the ore on Pulau Brani. Chinese capitalists in Singapore and the other Straits Settlements invested in the development of tin mines and rubber plantations in the Malay states. In 1914, Chinese businessmen controlled over seventy percent of the tin production in Malaya.<sup>177</sup> It would seem that the colour bar policy within the administration was not paralleled by a colour bar in the Malayan economy, where Chinese capitalists were remarkably successful. All professional and administrative elites in Singapore and its Malayan hinterland were ultimately dependent upon the success of the economic system, and Asian business elites seem to have had every reason to be pleased with the colonial

---

<sup>173</sup> On the relationship between community service and social status, see: Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, pp. 74 and 147; C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership*, pp. xvi-xvii, 7-8, 11-13, 19, 110-111, 129-131, and 139-141; C.M. Turnbull, *A History*, p. 54; and: Chan Kwok Bun and Claire Chiang See Ngoh, *Stepping Out*, pp. 292 and 353. On the cultural background of the connection between philanthropy and the social advancement of Chinese merchants, see: Wang Gungwu, "The Culture of Chinese Merchants," in: Wang Gungwu. *China and the Chinese Overseas*, p. 187.

<sup>174</sup> Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, pp. 143-146.

<sup>175</sup> Tregonning, *Home Port Singapore: A History of Straits Steamship Company Limited 1890-1965*, p. 47.

<sup>176</sup> Tregonning, *Straits Tin: A Brief Account of the First Seventy-Five Years of The Straits Trading Company, Limited. 1887-1962*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>177</sup> Wong Lin Ken, "Western Enterprise and the Development of the Malayan Tin Industry to 1914," in: C. D. Cowan, ed. *The Economic Development of South-East Asia: Studies in Economic History and Political Economy*, p. 132.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

system, which provided them with the conditions they needed to achieve economic success and amass great wealth.

Instead, the colour bar affected mainly non-Malay *professionals* – for example, English-educated Straits Chinese, Indians, and Eurasians, who might have aspired to careers in the Malayan Civil Service if there had been no colour bar; and the colour bar was publicly criticised by at least three prominent English-educated Legislative Councillors: Dr. Lim Boon Keng,<sup>178</sup> Tan Cheng Lock<sup>179</sup> (later Sir Cheng Lock Tan), and Dr. Noel Leicester Clarke, a leading Singaporean Eurasian.<sup>180</sup> John Butcher has pointed out that Asians in the Straits did not seriously challenge the existence of the colour bar policy before World War Two.<sup>181</sup> While they were naturally insulted by this unfair policy, Asian elites also realised that they benefited from the colonial system, and they continued to express their support for this system<sup>182</sup> even though the colour bar policy unfairly excluded them from prestigious bureaucratic offices. To say that a relationship is *cooperative* is not to deny that there may be some drawbacks in even the most cooperative of partnerships. Any cooperative partnership, no matter how close and interdependent, may require a degree of tolerance for irritating or unpleasant aspects of

---

<sup>178</sup> John Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, p. 111; and: Lim Boon Keng, “Race and Empire with special reference to British Malaya,” pp. 101-114.

<sup>179</sup> John Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, pp. 176-177.

<sup>180</sup> John Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, p. 177; Francisca and Jacinta Cardoza, “They Made Their Mark: Prominent Eurasians in Singapore’s History,” in: Myrna Braga-Blake, ed., *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes*, p. 82; and: *British Malaya* magazine, October 1932, pp. 131-132.

<sup>181</sup> John Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, p. 177, and: K.G. Tregonning, “Tan Cheng Lock: A Malayan Nationalist,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Volume X, Number 1 (March 1979), pp. 28-29.

<sup>182</sup> Lim Boon Keng, “The Chinese in Malaya,” in: W. Feldwick, editor-in-chief. *Present Day Impressions of the Far East and Prominent and Progressive Chinese at Home and Abroad*, p. 880. See also the texts of the addresses presented to Governor Sir Arthur Henderson Young by representatives of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the Straits Chinese British Association on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1919, in: Song Ong Siang (Sir Ong Siang Song), *One Hundred Years’ History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 561-563. The ceremonial presentation of these addresses was reported, together with their texts, in the *Straits Times*, 7 February 1919, p. 9, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016569.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

the partnership; the benefits conferred by continuing cooperation and partnership may motivate a willingness to overlook or put up with the negative aspects.

The career options and limitations encountered by the English-educated Asian professional elites were quite different from the conditions faced by the Asian immigrant masses. What about the workers who earned their living through manual labour, many of whom were impoverished Chinese immigrants? Why did they migrate to Singapore, where they had to endure harsh living and working conditions,<sup>183</sup> year after year? It seems clear that it was because they found that these conditions in Singapore, as harsh as they were, were nevertheless preferable to the extreme poverty they had known in China.<sup>184</sup> They evidently felt that their opportunities in the Nanyang were better than those available in their homeland – as indicated by the fact that they voted with their feet, as generations of Chinese workers migrated to Singapore, decade after decade.<sup>185</sup> Their decision to migrate to Singapore and Malaya, as well as other locations in the Nanyang, might be compared with the decisions made by European emigrants who were migrating to North and South America and Australia at the same time – the Nanyang was to the impoverished peasants of China and India something like what the New World and the Antipodes were to the impoverished peasants of Europe in the nineteenth and early

---

<sup>183</sup> On the working and living conditions of Chinese immigrant labourers in colonial Singapore, see: James Francis Warren, *Rickshaw Coolie: A People's History of Singapore*.

<sup>184</sup> Joyce Ee, "Chinese Migration to Singapore, 1896-1941," *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. 2, No. 1, March 1961, pp. 33-50.

<sup>185</sup> On Asian migrants voting with their feet, see: Ian Copland, *The Burden of Empire: Perspectives on Imperialism and Colonialism*, p. 86.

twentieth centuries;<sup>186</sup> indeed, Raffles himself commented on this analogy with regard to the Chinese in 1819.<sup>187</sup>

### **Who was Really in Charge?**

An implication of this study is related to the question of who was really in charge in Singapore in the colonial era: the Chinese majority, or the European minority who were *officially* in charge. Narratives of Singapore's history written during the colonial era tended to emphasise the importance of the activities of European officials and European businessmen. Since independence, it has been suggested that the Chinese were really in charge, at least in the early stage of the colonial era.<sup>188</sup> It is important to be wary of either-or binaries or categorical concepts,<sup>189</sup> since the truth may instead be found somewhere in between the extremes. The balance may be tilted in one direction or the other depending on which aspect of power in colonial Singapore is emphasised in a particular analysis; for example, an emphasis on formal political or military power would tend to privilege the role of European officials and officers, while an emphasis on the commercial sector or the ownership of real estate would tend to highlight the role of Asian business elites and landowners.

In the case of colonial Singapore, it seems that economic and political power was actually held by *both* the leaders of the Chinese masses and other Asian elites, *and* by the

---

<sup>186</sup> See: K.G. Tregonning, *A History of Modern Malaya*, p. 175.

<sup>187</sup> See: Sir Stamford Raffles, "Minutes by Sir T.S. Raffles, On The Establishment of a Malay College at Singapore. 1819." In: Lady Raffles, *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles*, Appendix, p. 29, second paragraph.

<sup>188</sup> On Chinese power in colonial Singapore, see: Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, pp. 30, 47, 53, 61, 117, 273, and 274-275; Lea E. Williams, "Chinese Leadership in Early British Singapore," *Asian Studies*, Volume II, Number 2 (August 1964), pp. 170-171; K.G. Tregonning, *The British in Malaya: The First Forty Years 1786-1826*, p. 158; and: Paul Kratoska's Introduction, in: G.M. Reith, *Handbook to Singapore* (republished in 1985), pp. vi-vii.

<sup>189</sup> Regarding *categorical concepts*, see: Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*, p. 20.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

European minority as well. Indeed, the economic and political power of Asian elites and European elites alike was likely augmented and magnified in direct proportion to their success in working closely together and pooling their resources, including economic and military power, networks, influence, organisations, experience and expertise. They legitimised one another's status and authority as elites by cultivating connections among themselves, creating symbolic public imagery, and cooperating in the enhancement of their prestige, status, and prominence in the eyes of the public.

The social sphere of the cosmopolitan elite class was perhaps the only point at which all of the diverse racial and cultural elements of the population converged into at least a degree of unity, presenting a sense of colonial Singapore *society* or community as opposed to Furnivall's concept of a *plural society*,<sup>190</sup> that is, a population of different communities divided by racial and cultural differences. Elite-level interactions and connections, initiated and continued in the contexts of prestigious institutions, ceremonies, social gatherings, public celebrations, and sporting events, involved overarching horizontal connections between the vertical divisions within the population. Since these horizontal connections took place at the overarching or summit level,<sup>191</sup> the participants enhanced their prestige by associating with other high-status individuals,<sup>192</sup> and gained publicity for their own standing in society, thus enhancing the social reality of their elite status.

---

<sup>190</sup> Regarding J.S. Furnivall's conception of the *plural society*, see: J.S. Furnivall, *Netherlands India: A Study of Plural Economy*, pp. 446 and 449; and: J.S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice*, pp. 303-305. In *Colonial Policy and Practice*, on pp. 303 and 305, Furnivall applied the concept of the *plural society* to other colonies in Asia.

<sup>191</sup> Compare with Arend Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation*, especially pp. 82, 112-114, and 200.

<sup>192</sup> See the discussion of the *contagiousness* of prestige, in: Emile Benoit-Smullyan, "Status, Status Types, and Status Interrelations," *American Sociological Review*, Volume 9, Number 2 (April 1944), p. 157. Compare with: Robert W. Fuller, *Somebodies and Nobodies*, p. 75.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

Each time the elites of different racial or ethnic groups met and recognised one another's elite status – whether in a board room or a council chamber, or at a parade, a sporting event, or a garden party at Government House – they not only enhanced the legitimacy, prestige, and social reality of the cosmopolitan elite class to which they all belonged, but they also gained a reaffirmation or enhancement of their own individual prestige, which could be potentially useful to each of them within their own particular social circles and organisations, in much the same way that a national leader might hope to gain additional prestige and legitimacy with their own constituents at home by attending an ASEAN or United Nations meeting and being photographed with the leaders of other countries – the pictures and video images would be shown to the public back home, the domestic audience. There is thus a built-in prestige-reward system inherent in the institutional settings or patterns of interactions which bring elites together in cooperation and which tend to combine them into an elite class or community of prestige. This was part of a social mechanism through which elites integrated their class by cultivating their own overlapping social networks; the more influential people with whom each elite individual became acquainted, the more likely that these individuals would be able to obtain the cooperation of other people in gaining additional material, social, and symbolic benefits<sup>193</sup> – which, in turn, likely assisted them in further increasing and enhancing their social connections and networks.

---

<sup>193</sup> Regarding the usefulness of association with influential people in an individual's efforts to gain favours, see: Kwang-kuo Hwang, "Face and Favor: The Chinese Power Game," *The American Journal of Sociology*, Volume 92, Number 4 (January 1987), p. 958; see also the discussion of the relationship between people's social connections and networks and how others perceive their social status or image on p. 961, and the mention of overlapping social networks on p. 952. While Hwang's article is concerned with the Chinese social context, it seems likely that that these concepts apply to all societies.



## *Conclusions and Implications*

Inspired by the insights of Edward Shils and Clifford Geertz, the cosmopolitan elite class – comprising the *central zone*,<sup>194</sup> the *central institutional system*<sup>195</sup> and the *exemplary centre*<sup>196</sup> of the multiracial colonial society – may be seen as a socially unifying element within a context of racial and cultural diversity. Of course, this is not to say that colonial Singapore society was completely – or even mostly – unified; as Edward Shils pointed out, every society contains conflict.<sup>197</sup> Moreover, societies may contain many people who have little connection with the wider society beyond their own circles of family, friends, and acquaintances;<sup>198</sup> they may be neither integrated nor engaged in conflict. The point here is that, *in so far as* the colonial society was united – or, to such extent that we may speak of *a society* in colonial Singapore rather than of *plural societies* – and whatever limited degree of social unity that was achieved, was cultivated through the cooperative interactions, patterns of relationships, and prestigious institutions of leading Asians and Europeans, who together created an elite social structure – a *central institutional system*, to use the terminology of Edward Shils, or an *exemplary centre*, to borrow a term from Clifford Geertz. This centre transcended and bridged racial and cultural identities.

### **Why Should We Care about Elite Social Integration?**

An appreciation of the centrality of the multiracial elite class in the colonial society answers the *so what* question: *So the Asian and European elites combined themselves into a community of prestige by exchanging symbolic capital – so what?* To begin with, the social cohesion of this multiracial colonial elite class was important – not

---

<sup>194</sup> Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*, pp. 3, 4, and 13.

<sup>195</sup> Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*, pp. 6, 12, 14, 15, 38, and 39.

<sup>196</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*, pp. 13, 109, 120, and 124.

<sup>197</sup> Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*, pp. xii, 83, and 253.

<sup>198</sup> Dennis H. Wrong, *The Problem of Order: What Unites and Divides Society*, pp. 98-99.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

only to these elites, but to the wider population as well – because this class centred and organised the ethnically diverse colonial society, by pooling symbolic resources and creating central symbols and imagery (including rituals, institutions, and new traditions) and investing them with prestige. The system of prestigious institutions, rituals, and symbols created and controlled by these elites constituted the focal point for the entire society; as the elites of each section of the population were incorporated into this elite class, they confirmed the recognition of this system by each ethnic category.

There is no better way to approach the history of colonial Singapore than by starting with the partnership between Asian elites and European elites, a mutually beneficial relationship which was the central dynamic at the heart of the Settlement. Their partnership was rooted in the coincidence of their economic, political, social, and symbolic interests. Social cohesion among the members of the multiracial elite class was based upon their cooperation in the creation, distribution, and exchange of forms of symbolic capital. These activities fostered social connections which transcended cultural differences between Asian and European elites, thanks to their mutual appreciation of status and prestige. An appreciation of the location of the Asian colonial elites within the centre of the colonial society, and their social integration with their Western fellow elites, challenges and problematises what may be generally-accepted images of colonial society: the notion of *European* colonialism, with its implicit assumption of the centrality of one racial group; the application of the terms *empire-builder*, *colonialist*,<sup>199</sup> and *coloniser*

---

<sup>199</sup> For example, Chan Kwok Bun and Claire Chiang See Ngoh employed the term *colonialists*, with regard to colonial Singapore, in a way which suggests that they believed that this term applied only to the Europeans here, and not to the Chinese. See: Chan Kwok Bun and Claire Chiang See Ngoh, *Stepping Out: The Making of Chinese Entrepreneurs*, p. 33.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

exclusively to Westerners; and the widely-accepted Furnivallian concept of the *plural* colonial society.

An elite-centred explanation can be offered in response to the question of how societies are held together and made orderly, in spite of whatever centrifugal social tendencies are found within them. It may well be that, in all societies, the members of the population may be classified into three broad categories: first, there is a category of individuals who value the social *status quo* because they feel that they benefit from it, and/or that they stand to benefit from this system in the future. This category includes the elites, as well as non-elite supporters of the *status quo*. The elites and others in this category actively cooperate to make the rules and operate the institutions which organise the society, giving it a structure and a centre. The non-elites in this category include the people who enthusiastically carry out or enforce the rules, even though they may not have the power to help make those rules – for example, bureaucratic functionaries, policemen, foot soldiers, and so on – in other words, the loyal rank and file of the establishment.

Secondly, there is in many (if not all) societies a category of people who are dissatisfied with the social *status quo*, and who may resist the established order and the rules made by the elites; the actively dissatisfied people in this category may be termed rebels or challengers against the established elite authorities. Finally, there is a third category of people who neither devote themselves to actively supporting and helping the system, nor do they actively resist or oppose it. Some of the people in this category may be dissatisfied with the system, while others may accept it as a fact of life, or simply be preoccupied with their own daily lives and private concerns. Whether or not they think that the system is good for them, they evidently feel that they are better off accepting the

## *Conclusions and Implications*

*status quo* and complying with elite authority, rather than trying to challenge or resist it. These people are politically passive, and they go along with the rules made by the elites. This category of basically compliant individuals likely includes the vast majority of the population of most, if not all societies.

The role of elites and their patterns of cooperation are the key to understanding how and why orderly social systems exist. The elites tend to create and sustain orderly social systems by making the institutions of their class the centre and focal point of their society. The very nature of enjoying elite status means that these elites have a stake in the *status quo*, and thus tend to have an interest in maintaining order and stability. They endeavour to convince as many people as possible that the authority of the elite class is justified and legitimate, by publicly asserting that their elite-led system provides tangible and intangible benefits to the general public and by representing themselves publicly in ways which identify themselves and their institutions with all that is good. The elites represent the social institutional structure or hierarchy and their own position in that society and its hierarchy as natural, traditional, and beneficial to society – that they have a right to lead the society because of their family backgrounds, or their personal achievements, or both; that people like them have always been in charge, and that it is best for everyone.

It may be natural for the elites of nation-states to endeavour to make the masses feel that the elite-led social system is actually inclusive and belongs to everybody, including the masses as well as the elites. In this way, the elites endeavour to ensure that the masses will continue to follow the rules which the elites make, and that if the members of the general public do not all buy into the system and become active and

## *Conclusions and Implications*

enthusiastic supporters of the social *status quo*, at least they do not go over to the side of those who actively challenge or resist the elites and their system. Finally, the elites may cooperate to enlist the active support of enough non-elites to marginalise or neutralise the challengers and rebels, and prevent them from upsetting the system. If the elites are successful in this, the active challengers and rebels will always be few in number, socially isolated and politically marginalised.

This may be termed a Machiavellian answer to the question of how orderly social systems are created and sustained. Machiavelli explained that most citizens will not oppose their government as long as their rights are respected, and so a ruler only needs to worry about a relatively small number of ambitious individuals, who might potentially challenge his authority.<sup>200</sup> To apply sociological terms to this explanation, societies are integrated by means of a mixture of *social* integration and *system* integration. Social integration involves normative agreement and consensus, while system integration involves obedience to the rules.<sup>201</sup> It would be only natural to expect to find both social and system integration at both the elite and mass levels; but it seems likely that consensus is more of a factor at the elite level, while system integration is probably more of a factor at the mass level, since the masses generally comply with elite authority and elite-led social structures in every society.

The crucial role of elites in organising social systems and centring societies highlights the importance of elites in social history, despite their relative numerical insignificance. Though few in number, elites have a disproportionate effect on societies. Social historians should consider the ways in which elites cultivate connections and

---

<sup>200</sup> Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chapters 9, 17, 19, and 21.

<sup>201</sup> See: Dennis H. Wrong, *The Problem of Order*, pp. 227, 231-233, and endnote 82 on p. 314.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

patterns of interactions among themselves, giving cohesion to their class and providing the basis and context for their cooperation in realising their political, economic, and symbolic goals and shaping the development of the societies which they lead.

It seems likely that, at the centre of all societies – past and present, traditional and modern, capitalist and communist, Eastern and Western – have been led by relatively small groups of privileged people, privileged in the sense of possessing more wealth, power, influence, and prestige than their fellow citizens.<sup>202</sup> These elites have been more or less open or closed to new members from non-elite families and backgrounds in different places and times. Their superior social, political, and economic position has been variously explained by citing the concept or meritocracy, by arguing that individuals can possess a Divine Right to rule or a Mandate of Heaven, or that elites are people blessed with superior genes or above average levels of intelligence, or that they have been favoured by some sort of pseudo-Darwinian pseudo-scientific process of natural selection. However, it seems more likely that Gaetano Mosca was correct, and that these people – the elites – have managed to hold power because they are an organised group in the midst of the relatively unorganised masses;<sup>203</sup> the elites work closely together, organising themselves for cooperation and teamwork, and recruiting new members to reproduce their organisations and ascendancy over time. Like any team, the members of the elite classes distinguish themselves from the general public and give themselves a

---

<sup>202</sup> Regarding the ubiquity of elites and inequality in societies, see: E. Digby Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen*, pp. 3-4; Tom Bottomore, *Elites and Society*, pp. 3, 5, and 10; Vilfredo Pareto, “The Treatise on General Sociology,” in: Keith Grint, editor, *Leadership*, pp. 70-81; Robert Michels, *Political Parties*, pp. 377, 383, and 390; and: Gaetano Mosca, “The Ruling Class,” in: David B. Grusky, editor, *Social Stratification*, pp. 195-201. Regarding Arnold Toynbee’s concept of the *creative minority*, see: Pitirim A. Sorokin, “Arnold J. Toynbee’s Philosophy of History,” *The Journal of Modern History*, Volume 12, Number 3 (September 1940), pp. 375, 376, and 377; and: Michael D. Barr, *Lee Kuan Yew: The Beliefs Behind the Man*, pp. 112-113.

<sup>203</sup> Gaetano Mosca, “The Ruling Class,” in: David B. Grusky, editor, *Social Stratification*, p. 197.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

sense of collective identity as members of the elite class. Just as the members of a sporting team distinguish themselves by wearing distinctive uniforms with certain emblems, so do elites distinguish themselves from the masses and accomplish social stratification by adopting emblems and symbols of distinction, status, and prestige, by adopting distinctive lifestyles and patterns of conspicuous consumption,<sup>204</sup> by belonging to certain organisations and taking part in distinctive activities, by creating institutions which bestow titles and other honours on one another, and by fostering prestigious imagery for themselves and their class.

By these means, the elites ensure that they can easily recognise one another as fellow elites. By setting themselves apart from – and above – the general public, they thereby place themselves together in the same locale within the colonial social space, a circle of prestige and status in the centre of their society. This social and symbolic processes of the elite class were thus *inclusive* regarding the Asian and European elites who belonged to this class, yet also *exclusive* regarding the differentiation of this multiracial elite class from the rest of the population. The lifestyles and social activities of elites can provide them with shared experiences as well as emblems and badges of status, helping to bring elites into close social proximity with one another, minimising social distance between elites despite their cultural differences, while simultaneously asserting the social distance between their class and the general public. They can develop acquaintanceships and social connections within their shared region of social space, and promote such social linkages by exchanging and sharing in symbolic capital.

---

<sup>204</sup> Regarding the lifestyles of conspicuous consumption of the wealthy Chinese in colonial Singapore, see: Charlotte Cameron, *Wanderings in South-Eastern Seas* (1924), p. 32; and: Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, p. 146.

### **Asian and European Elites were On the Same Team**

Just as the success of a sports team is due in large part to their teamwork – to how the members of the team manage to cooperate closely to play the game and win – so too the ability of the members of an elite class to realise their individual material and symbolic goals, as well as to collectively sustain the social centrality and ascendancy of their class is due in large part to their teamwork and social capital, which, in turn, is fostered by the promotion of social connections and cooperative interaction among themselves. These processes are facilitated by their success in asserting their distinctive elite identity and status by using status symbols to set themselves apart from the rest of the population, and to distinguish themselves as belonging together in a prestigious locale of social space at the centre of their society. In colonial Singapore, Asian and European elites created a shared vocabulary or *idiom* of symbols of status and prestige.<sup>205</sup> By associating themselves, individually and collectively, with this set of status symbols, these elites distinguished themselves from the masses and affirmed their shared membership in the elite class, the community of prestige. Such symbolic imagery reinforced the sense that, since they shared interests in prestige and status as well as wealth and power, they had good reason to continue working together, and to carefully cultivate their social connections with one another, despite their cultural differences.

By cooperating in the creation of symbolic capital or prestige and by sharing this capital among themselves, elites (in any society) can ensure that they all have a stake in the system, which motivates all elites to play by the rules and sustain the system – and this gives all of their actions and interactions a high degree of predictability, which, in

---

<sup>205</sup> Regarding ritual *idiom*, see: Bernard S. Cohn, “Representing Authority in Victorian India,” in: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, editors, *The Invention of Tradition*, pp. 178, 181, 208, and 209.



### *Conclusions and Implications*

turn, facilitates the strengthening of their social capital and their continued cooperation for their mutual benefit. Aside from the financial benefits of their cooperation in terms of acquiring material wealth, and the political benefits of cooperating to sustain the political order, there is also a considerable intrinsic benefit to these elites, in terms of enjoying the prestige and deference that goes along with high rank and membership in a select and highly honoured social circle at the centre of society.<sup>206</sup> It seems that prestige and deference are enjoyed by humanity in general, and by elites in particular.

All of these social processes can be facilitated if the elites share – or assimilate into – a common culture; then, their shared identification with the tastes, styles, and perceptions of a distinctive elite culture will help to sustain the reproduction of their class and its privileges over time, as Pierre Bourdieu explained. However, colonial Singapore presents an example of a diverse society which was not united by a common culture – instead, cultural diversity divided the ethnically plural colonial society, which included Arabs, Chinese, Eurasians, Europeans, Indians, Japanese, Jews, and Malays. Still, leading and ambitious Asians and Europeans needed to work together for their mutual advantage. How, then, did these Asian and European elites manage to overcome their cultural differences to combine into an elite class at the centre of the colonial society, providing the context for their cooperation, when they could not appeal to a shared elite culture, nor did they all assimilate into a single homogenised cultural identity? This study explores how they accomplished this elite-level social integration, by developing social linkages with one another through their institutions and their cooperation in the creation, consumption, and exchange of symbolic capital.

---

<sup>206</sup> Edward Shils, “Deference,” in: Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*, p. 283.

### **Public Representations of a Cosmopolitan Elite Class**

The public representations of the multiracial elite class in colonial Singapore included the conspicuous assertions of the prestige of individual elites and the legitimacy of their identity and status as elites at the centre of the colonial society. On a collective level, the representations asserted the prestige and legitimacy of their institutions, of which these elites were the leaders, and of the location of themselves as well as their institutions in the centre of the colonial society. Their public assertions of prestige and legitimacy, ascendancy and centrality – by means of public celebrations and rituals, written publications, and the design of buildings and spaces – may be interpreted as invitations or challenges to the general public: the masses were invited to either accept or reject these assertions of elite status and prestige.

It would seem that many people responded by accepting the assertions of elite ascendancy, either actively by enthusiastically taking part in public celebrations as participants (for example, by marching in parades), or by passively accepting the elite representations by simply attending the public celebrations as spectators in the streets, and by complying with the rules imposed by the elites, including the formal or informal rules about staying out of the way of the parades in the streets. At the same time, these elite representations involved a challenge, defying or daring anyone who disapproved to try to oppose them – however, it seems that few dissenters rose to the challenge. During the celebrations of the Silver Jubilee of King George V in 1935, someone attempted to bomb a ceremonial archway which had been set up by the Arab community, but this failed attempt seems to have been an exceptional incident.<sup>207</sup>

---

<sup>207</sup> *Straits Times*, 6 May 1935, p. 12; compare with the comments on the general mood in: *Straits Times*, 8 May 1935, p. 12.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

It is likely that many people accepted these assertions of elite legitimacy and prestige because they genuinely supported the colonial system, perceiving it to be beneficial to their own interests and preferable to the available alternatives at the time. However, even those who were not enamoured with the colonial system would have likely been disinclined to resist or oppose the public representations of the elites. Thanks to the powerful motivations of social conformity, even those who were not actually supporters of the system would have been unlikely to challenge the representations that were asserted by the Asian and European elites and their supporters and followers. The acceptance of a social system, with its centre and hierarchy, is socially normal; to reject or resist the system means going against social norms.

The annual royal birthday celebrations, and other imperial extravaganzas, reinforced the social normality of the system and the centrality of its elite class, encouraging the masses to accept it and discouraging resistance. Public acceptance – both active and passive – of public representations of elite ascendancy and prestige conferred legitimacy on the system and its centre, investing it with a sense of naturalness and inevitability, and underlining the fact that the elites and their followers were very well-organised, well-coordinated, numerous, and cohesive, while the majority compliantly went along with the prevailing system. The prestige and ascendancy of the elites and the legitimacy of their location in the centre of the society and the colonial system was given social reality by public representations and their popular acceptance.

As the patterns of elite representations of the centre of the colonial society and their own ascendancy within it became time-honoured and traditional through their

### *Conclusions and Implications*

continuity or repetition over the years, acquiring a sense of the sanctity of heritage,<sup>208</sup> the social motivation towards conformity and acceptance grew in strength. For the immigrants who arrived in colonial Singapore, and for those who were born here, the acceptance (either active or passive) of the traditional ascendancy of the elites and their status at the centre of society was a normal aspect of the process by which they found their place in the society here. In this way, the social structure reproduced and perpetuated itself as it was represented to, and accepted by, wave after wave of immigrants. The elite class in colonial Singapore was not so much a floating community, as a community including people who moved here from China, Europe, India, and elsewhere, and who stayed here for many years (sometimes for the rest of their lives), as well as locally-born residents. Meanwhile, anyone who might choose to try to defy the prevailing trend towards acceptance of the system and its central elites by resisting or challenging the establishment could expect to face the unified alliance of the members of an organised elite class and their supporters, all motivated to cooperate with one another in protecting their interests as stakeholders in the prevailing social and political *status quo* of the colonial system, because of the material and symbolic benefits which they jointly derived from it.

While the close cooperation among the Asian and European colonial elites fostered the acceptance of elite authority among the masses, this did not mean that everyone was compliant all the time, or that conflict was ever completely eliminated from this society. Certainly there was a degree of conflict between certain individuals and groups in colonial Singapore, just as there was also a degree of consensus and

---

<sup>208</sup> On the authority and esteem of the past and tradition, see: Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, p. 29; and: Edward Shils, "Tradition," in: Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*, pp. 186 and 191.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

cooperation, especially among elites. However, neither conflict nor consensus provides a plausible theme to characterise this society as a whole. The relatively high degree of order and stability throughout the colonial era precludes acceptance of conflict as a prevailing theme in that time; indeed, considering the great racial and ethnic diversity within the population, and the wide disparity in income, in wealth, and in living standards between the elites and the masses, it seems remarkable that colonial Singapore was as stable and orderly as it was. On the other hand, these same differences between different categories of people here – the cultural distinctions and the differences in living standards between rich and poor – suggest that some sort of consensus among all of the people here was highly unlikely.

While some conflict and some consensus were present, the broader theme was one of mass compliance with elite authority. While Asian elites and European elites cooperated closely, cultivating their connections and presenting a generally unified front as an elite class, the masses generally went along with the authority of the elite establishment and its interlocking network of political, economic, and social institutions, all of which served to support the power, privilege, and prestige of the elite class. While most of the population complied with elite authority, the elites could always use the police and the military to deal with the few who chose to resist or struggle against their authority. Of course, this is not to say that there was anything unique about this pattern of elite-level cooperation and mass-level compliance in colonial Singapore; indeed, it seems quite likely that the combination of elite cooperation and mass compliance could be found in most, if not all societies, everywhere, in the past as well as the present. It might seem that this point is too obvious to deserve more than passing mention, were it

## *Conclusions and Implications*

not for the fact that social theory has emphasised the supposed binary opposites or alternatives of the conflict model and the consensus model of society, yet it seems unlikely that either the theme of romanticised conflict or the theme of utopian consensus could serve as an overarching theme to explain real societies in the real world.

A detailed explanation of how colonial elites exercised power and influence in government and business is best left to political, administrative, and economic historians. This study, as a social history of the cosmopolitan elite class, is concerned with the big picture of how the Asian and European elites integrated their class, by exploring the ways in which they cooperated in the enhancement of their collective symbolic capital, and the representation of their social status and class cohesion in rituals, buildings, printed publications. These social processes provided the social context for the political, economic, and administrative developments.

### **A Social Mechanism**

As elite Asians and Europeans cooperated in the public representation and image-making of their class, as well as of its prestige and its traditional legitimacy at the centre of the colonial society, they increased the symbolic benefits inherent in membership in this class, and thereby strengthened their motivation and the motivation of their successors in future generations to continue to cultivate the social integration of this multiracial class, despite its cultural diversity. Once set in motion, the closely interrelated patterns and processes of elite-level social integration and public representation had a life of its own, a social mechanism activated by the typical craving for symbolic capital of elites and would-be elites alike. Indeed, this hankering for prestige was probably even more important and fundamental than the profit motive, since

### *Conclusions and Implications*

the wealthy business and professional elites who worked to increase their wealth, likely did so because they could use their surplus wealth to enhance their symbolic capital, either through conspicuous consumption, or philanthropic generosity, or simply through the reputation of being wealthy. The striving and cooperative competition of elites for prestige and status within the colonial social structure – in other words, their participation in the colonial social game – activated a social mechanism which promoted the continuity of their social structure throughout the colonial era and beyond.

An appreciation of the extent to which Asian elites were at the centre of the colonial system allows for a better understanding of the degree of social continuity which has prevailed throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, transcending the end of colonialism and the establishment of independent post-colonial nation-states. The transition from the colonial era to the post-colonial era did not necessarily involve a revolutionary social transformation in terms of the social structure. While some of the colonial symbols and labels may have been replaced by new nationalist symbolic idiom, the underlying social structure was not necessarily changed. It would be easier to accept the notion that the transition from the colonial to the post-colonial era involved some sort of a social revolution, if we could believe in a Furnivallian vision of the colonial-era elite class, as a class which was made up entirely of Europeans, and that this Western colonial elite class was replaced by an indigenous nationalist elite class; however, if our historical exploration of this class reveals that most of the members of the colonial elite class were actually likely to have been Asian elites, then the idea of a post-colonial social revolution becomes difficult to accept.

### **Imperial and Global Elites**

In the colonial era, Asian elites were members of an international elite class, within a global institutional structure that was then called *imperialism*; since then, in the post-colonial era, Asian elites have continued to be members of an international elite class, within a transnational institutional framework, which is now described as *globalisation*. Today, Asian elites attend elite Western universities, and play golf and tennis at prestigious country clubs, just like their Western fellow elites. Wealthy Asian elites collect luxury automobiles and fine works of art, and enjoy savouring fine wines, as do Western elites. Many Asian elites can speak English, and probably feel comfortable socialising with Western elites; their experiences as students at the same elite Western universities and their mutual interests in golf and tennis, as well as art and automobiles, likely provide them with topics of conversation. It should be no surprise if Asian elites find more in common, in terms of lifestyles and interests, with their Western fellow elites, than with the mass of Asian workers and peasants.

In today's globalised world, luxury automobiles, expensive wines, degrees from prestigious universities, and memberships in exclusive country clubs, should, perhaps, be regarded not so much as examples of *Western* culture, but rather as the *international* status symbols of a globalised world; these symbols now belong to Asian elites just as much as they do to Western elites. Since Asian and Western elites have accepted the same symbolic order, they can easily recognise one another as fellow members of the global elite class. Cultural or ethnic differences have not prevented the cooperative interaction of these elites. The social affinity of Asian and Western elites has continued from the nineteenth century, through the twentieth and on into the twenty-first, and has



## *Conclusions and Implications*

grown steadily stronger. Resourceful Asian elites have done very well for themselves under globalisation, just as they did under imperialism, and there is every reason to expect that they will continue to succeed.

In summary, this study of the development of the multiracial elite class and its social integration through exchanges of symbolic capital in colonial Singapore challenges what are, perhaps, the conventional views of colonial history, especially, the emphasis on the role of conflict in social history; the focus on racial identities, divisions, and tensions, and ethnic compartmentalisation;<sup>209</sup> and the emphasis on the role of Europeans in colonialism, an emphasis which tends to privilege the role of Europeans at the expense of non-Europeans, regardless of whether or not the European colonial activities are viewed as positive or negative. Instead, this study suggests an alternative approach to colonial social history, including a focus on the active *cooperation* of Asian and European elites as partners in colonialism, as a crucial dynamic in colonial history; Asian elites eagerly cooperated as the partners of their European fellow elites, rather than merely being co-opted as subordinates. This study emphasises multiracial elite class identity and organisation, including the important role of the creation, sharing, and exchange of symbolic capital among Asian and European elites in the creation of the social capital and cohesion of their cosmopolitan elite class; and an appreciation of the crucial role of Asian elites as the partners of European elites in colonial history and empire-building, with the colonial system (at least in Singapore and its Malayan hinterland) seen as the outcome of a mutually-beneficial joint enterprise or alliance between Asian and European elites, a

---

<sup>209</sup> Regarding the problem of compartmentalisation and the importance of multiethnic interactions in colonial-era Malaya, see: Wu Xiao An, *Chinese Business in the Making of a Malay State, 1882-1941: Kedah and Penang*, pp. 4, 6, 10, 181-182, and 187.

### *Conclusions and Implications*

pattern of close multiethnic and multiracial cooperation which lasted for nearly one and a half centuries and created at least as many opulent Asian plutocrats as European tycoons.

The colonial system in Singapore and Malaya was not merely *European* colonialism – it was, rather, a system operated by both Asian and European elites for their mutual benefit in both material and social or symbolic forms. The social integration of Asian and European elites into a cohesive elite class provided the social context for their economic and political cooperation. The cooperative interaction of Asian and European elites in creating, distributing, and exchanging symbolic capital amongst themselves, associating with one another, recognising one another's status and including each other in prestigious activities and organisations, played a crucial role in socially integrating these elites into a cosmopolitan elite class – a multiracial community of prestige – and sustaining this ethnically diverse social structure throughout the colonial era.

## **Bibliography – Works Consulted**

### **Official Archival Records**

*Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, NUS Law Library, Bukit Timah Campus.

Colonial Office files, CO 273 and CO 275, in the microfilm collection of the NUS Central Library.

Minute Book of the Garden Club, including minutes of meetings in various years from 1931 to 1974, in the National Archives of Singapore, microfilm reel NA 110.

India Office Records, “Board’s Collections 28767 to 29049 1828 – 1829. VOL. 1050 F / 4 / 1050 Record Department,” I.O.R. / F / 4 / 1050 / 28824, pp. 3-4, text of a letter from S.G. Bonham, Acting Resident of Singapore, to Chief Secretary Lushington, dated 3 April 1826, in the collection of the British Library, Euston Road, London.

**Private Collection:** Simon Monteiro’s collection of historical documents related to property ownership in colonial Singapore.

### **Chinese-Language Singapore Newspapers in the Colonial Era**

*Chin Nam Poh*

*Kok Min Jit Poh*

*Lat Pau*

*Nanyang Chung Wei Pao (Union Times)*

*Nanyang Siang Pau*

*Sin Chew Jit Poh*

*Sin Kok Min Jit Pao (Sin Kuo Min Poh)*

### **English-Language Singapore Newspapers in the Colonial Era**

*The Singapore Chronicle*

*The Singapore Daily Times*

*The Singapore Free Press*

*The Straits Times*

*The Malaya Tribune*

### **Other English-language Periodicals**

The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British India and its Dependencies, British Library shelf mark ST 76

## Bibliography

*British Malaya* (magazine)

### **Annual Local Directories**

*The Straits Times Almanack, Calendar and Directory* for the years 1846 and 1847.

*The Singapore Almanack and Directory* for the years 1848 to 1852, 1855, and 1858.

*The Royal Almanack & Directory*, for the years 1859 and 1860.

*The Straits Calendar and Directory*, for the years 1861, 1863, 1865, and 1870-1874.

*The Royal Almanac & Directory for the year 1864*.

*The Singapore Directory for the Straits Settlements*, for the years 1877-1879.

*The Singapore and Straits Directory*, for the years 1880-1919.

*The Singapore and Malayan Directory*, for the years 1930-1940.

### **Books (Including Chapters in Books)**

Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir (also known as Munshi Abdullah). *The Hikayat Abdullah*. Translated by A.H. Hill. Kuala Lumpur and Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir. *The Story of the Voyage of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, Munshi*, an English translation of *Kesah Pelayaran Abdullah*, translated by A.E. Coope. Singapore: Malaya Pub. House, 1949. (Quoted in: John Bastin and Robin W. Winks, compilers. *Malaysia: Selected Historical Readings*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1966, pp. 142-151.)

Agulhon, Maurice. "Politics, Images, and Symbols in Post-Revolutionary France." In: Sean Wilentz, ed. *Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual, and Politics Since the Middle Ages*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, pp. 177-205.

Akashi, Yoji. *The Nanyang Chinese National Salvation Movement, 1937-1941*. International Studies, East Asian Series, Research Publication, Number Five. [Lawrence, Kansas (?): The University of Kansas, Center for East Asian Studies, 1970.

Alexander, Jeffrey C., Bernhard Giesen, Richard Munch, and Neil J. Smelser, editors, *The Micro-Macro Link*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1987.

## Bibliography

Allen, Charles, editor, in association with Michael Mason. *Tales from the South China Seas: Images of the British in South-East Asia in the Twentieth Century*. With an Introduction by Sjovald Cunyngham-Brown. London: Andre Deutsch Limited and the British Broadcasting Corporation, 1983.

Allen, J. de V., A.J. Stockwell, and L.R. Wright, editors. *A Collection of Treaties and Other Documents Affecting the States of Malaysia 1761-1963*. With a Foreword by C.D. Cowan. London, Rome, and New York: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1981.

Aljunied, Syed Muhd Khairudin. *Rethinking Raffles: A Study of Stamford Raffles' Discourse on Religions Amongst Malays*. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2005.

Almond, Gabriel A. *Plutocracy and Politics in New York City*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised Edition. London and New York: Verso, 1991.

Anderson, Charles W., Fred R. von der Mehden, and Crawford Young. *Issues of Political Development*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967.

Ang, Dennis, Chia Ming Chien, Ng Khee Jin, Clarence Tan, Tan Chi Chiu, and Maureen Thevathasan. *Hearts, Hopes & Aims: The Spirit of the Anglo-Chinese School*. Singapore: Anglo-Chinese School Old Boys' Association, 1986.

Angell, Robert Cooley. "Integration: Social Integration." In: David L. Sills, editor. *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. The Macmillan Company & The Free Press, 1968, Volume 7, pp. 380-386.

*Annual Report of the University of Malaya 1949-50*. Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1951.

Anson, Major-General Sir Archibald Edward Harbord. *About Others and Myself 1745 to 1920*. London: John Murray, 1920.

Aplin, N.G., and Quek Jin Jong. "Celestials in Touch: Sport and the Chinese in Colonial Singapore." In: J.A. Mangan and Fan Hong, editors. *Sport in Asian Society: Past and Present*. London and Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003, pp. 67-98.

Aung-Thwin, Michael A. *Myth and History in the Historiography of Early Burma: Paradigms, Primary Sources, and Prejudices*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1998.

## Bibliography

Baker, Chris. "Afterward: Autonomy's Meanings." In: Sunait Chutintaranond and Chris Baker, editors. *Recalling Local Pasts: Autonomous History in Southeast Asia*. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2002, pp. 167-182.

Balandier, G. "The Colonial Situation: A Theoretical Approach." In: Immanuel Wallerstein, editor. *Social Change: The Colonial Situation*. New York, London, and Sydney: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1966, pp. 34-61. (A translation, by Robert A. Wagoner, of "La Situation Coloniale: Approche Théorique," *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie*, XI, 1951, pp. 44-79.)

Baltzell, E. Digby. *Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class*. New York: The Free Press, 1958.

Baltzell, E. Digby. *The Protestant Establishment: Aristocracy & Caste in America*. New York: Vintage Books, 1966.

Baltzell, E. Digby. *The Protestant Establishment Revisited*. Edited, and with an Introduction by, Howard G. Schneiderman. New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1991.

Baltzell, E. Digby. *Sporting Gentlemen: Men's Tennis from the Age of Honor to the Cult of the Superstar*. New York: The Free Press, 1995.

Baltzell, E. Digby, with Howard G. Schneiderman. "Social Class in the Oval Office." In: E. Digby Baltzell. *The Protestant Establishment Revisited*. Edited, and with an Introduction by, Howard G. Schneiderman. New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1991, pp. 241-259.

Baltzell, E. Digby. "Upper Class and Elites." In: E. Digby Baltzell. *The Protestant Establishment Revisited*. Edited, and with an Introduction by, Howard G. Schneiderman. New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1991, pp. 25-31.

Barlow, H.S. *Swettenham*. Kuala Lumpur: Southdene Sdn. Bhd., 1995.

Barr, Michael D. *Lee Kuan Yew: The Beliefs Behind the Man*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000.

Barrington, Brook, editor. *Empires, Imperialism and Southeast Asia: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Tarling*. Clayton, VIC, Australia: Monash Asia Institute, 1997.

Barth, Fredrik, editor. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. Bergen, Oslo: Universitets Forlaget, and London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969. Reprint 1970.

## Bibliography

Barth, Valerie. "Belonging: Eurasian Clubs and Associations." In: Myrna Braga-Blake, ed., with co-researcher Ann Ebert-Oehlers. *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes*. Singapore: Times Editions Pte Ltd, 1992, pp. 97-107.

Bastin, John. *The Study of Modern Southeast Asian History: An Inaugural Lecture delivered in the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur on 14 December 1959*. Kuala Lumpur: The University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, 1959.

Bastin, John. *Travellers' Singapore: An Anthology*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Bastin, John, and Robin W. Winks, compilers. *Malaysia: Selected Historical Readings*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1966.

Bayly, C.A. *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire. (The New Cambridge History of India)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Bazell, C. "Education in Singapore." In: Walter Makepeace, Gilbert E. Brooke, and Roland St. J. Braddell, editors. *One Hundred Years of Singapore*. London: John Murray, 1921. Republished with an Introduction by C.M. Turnbull: Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991, Volume One, pp. 427-476.

Bellah, Robert N. *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World*. New York, Evanston, and London: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1970.

Benda, Harry J. *Continuity and Change in Southeast Asia: Collected Journal Articles of Harry J. Benda*. New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies Monograph Series No. 18, 1972.

Benda, Harry J. "Political Elites in Colonial Southeast Asia: An Historical Analysis." In: Benda, Harry J. *Continuity and Change in Southeast Asia: Collected Journal Articles of Harry J. Benda*. New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies Monograph Series No. 18, 1972, pp. 186-204.

Bergère, Marie-Claire. *The Golden Age of the Chinese Bourgeoisie 1911-1937*. Originally published as *L'Age d'or de la bourgeoisie chinoise* by Editions Flammarion in 1986. Translated by Janet Lloyd. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Bickers, Robert. *Britain in China: Community, Culture and Colonialism 1900-1949*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999.

Bieder, Joan. *Jews of Singapore*. Singapore: Suntree Media, 2007.

Bird, Isabella L. *The Golden Chersonese and the Way Thither*, London, John Murray, 1883.

## Bibliography

Blackstone, Sir William. *Commentaries on the Laws of England. Book the First*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1765. Reprinted: London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1966.

Blau, Peter M. *Exchange and Power in Social Life*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1964.

Blau, Peter M., and Joseph E. Schwartz. *Crosscutting Social Circles: Testing a Macrostructural Theory of Intergroup Relations*. Orlando: Academic Press, Inc., 1984.

Blythe, Wilfred. *The Impact of Chinese Secret Societies in Malaya: A Historical Study*. London, Kuala Lumpur, and Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1969.

Boas, Franz. *The Social Organization and the Secret Societies of the Kwakiutl Indians*. New York and London: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1970.

Bogaars, George. *The Tanjong Pagar Dock Company, 1864-1905*. Memoirs of the Raffles Museum, No. 3, December 1956. Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1956.

Bottomore, Tom. *Elites and Society*. Second Edition. London and New York: Routledge, 1993.

Boulding, K. E. "The Place of the Image in the Dynamics of Society." In: George K. Zollschan and Walter Hirsch, editors. *Explorations in Social Change*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964, pp. 5-16.

Boulger, Demetrius Charles de Kavanagh. *The Life of Sir Stamford Raffles*. London: Horace Marshall & Son, 1897. Reprinted in 1899. Reprinted, with a Preface by John Bastin. Amsterdam and Kuala Lumpur: The Pepin Press, 1999.

Bourdieu, Pierre. "The Economy of Symbolic Goods." In: Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*. An English translation of *Raisons Pratiques* (1994). Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998, pp. 92-123.

Bourdieu, Pierre. "The Forms of Capital." Translated by Richard Nice. In: John G. Richardson, editor, *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. New York, Westport (Connecticut), and London: Greenwood Press, 1986, pp. 241-258. (Also in: Mark Granovetter and Richard Swedberg, editors, *The Sociology of Economic Life*. Second Edition. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2001, pp. 96-111. "The Forms of Capital" was originally published as: "Ökonomisches Kapital, kulturelles Kapital, soziales Kapital" in: Reinhard Kreckel, editor, *Soziale Ungleichheiten*, Goettingen: Otto Schartz & Co., 1983, pp. 183-198.)

Bourdieu, Pierre. *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*. Translated by Matthew Adamson. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.



## Bibliography

Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Logic of Practice*. An English translation of *Le sens pratique* (1980), translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. An English translation of *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique, précédé de trois des d'ethnologie kabyle* (1972), translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*. An English translation of *Raisons Pratiques* (1994). Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998.

Bourdieu, Pierre. "The Reality of Representation and the Representation of Reality." In: Patrick Joyce, ed., *Class*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 99-101. (Quoted from: Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, pp. 482-484.)

Bourdieu, Pierre. "Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field." In: *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*. An English translation of *Raisons Pratiques* (1994). Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998, pp. 35-63.

Bourdieu, Pierre. "Social Space and Symbolic Power." In: Donald McQuarrie, editor, with contributions by R. Serge Denisoff. *Readings in Contemporary Sociological Theory: From Modernity to Post-Modernity*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1995, pp. 323-334. Reprinted from *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Spring 1989), pp. 14-25. ("Social Space and Symbolic Power" may also be found in: Pierre Bourdieu. *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*. Translated by Matthew Adamson. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990, pp. 123-139.)

Bourdieu, Pierre. "Social Space and Symbolic Space." In: Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*. An English translation of *Raisons Pratiques* (1994). Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998, pp. 1-13.

Braddell, Dato Sir Roland St. John. "Crime: Its Punishment and Prevention." In: Walter Makepeace, Gilbert E. Brooke, and Roland St. J. Braddell, editors. *One Hundred Years of Singapore*. London: John Murray, 1921. Republished with an Introduction by C.M. Turnbull: Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991, Volume One, pp. 244-290.

Braddell, Dato Sir Roland St. John. "The Good Old Days." In: Walter Makepeace, Gilbert E. Brooke, and Roland St. J. Braddell, editors. *One Hundred Years of Singapore*. London: John Murray, 1921. Republished with an Introduction by C.M. Turnbull: Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991, Volume Two, pp. 465-524.

Braddell, Dato Sir Roland St. John. *The Law of the Straits Settlements: A Commentary*. Third Edition, with an introduction by M.B. Hooker. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1982. This edition is a reprint of the first edition, published in Singapore in 1915.

Braddell, Dato Sir Roland St. John. *The Lights of Singapore*. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1934.

## Bibliography

Braga-Blake, Myrna. "Eurasians in Singapore: An Overview." In: Myrna Braga-Blake, ed., with co-researcher Ann Ebert-Oehlers. *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes*. Singapore: Times Editions Pte Ltd, 1992, pp. 11-23.

Braga-Blake, Myrna, editor, with co-researcher Ann Ebert-Oehlers. *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes*. Singapore: Times Editions Pte Ltd, 1992.

Braga-Blake, Myrna, and Ann Ebert-Oehlers. "Where The Twain Met: Origins of Eurasian Families." In: Myrna Braga-Blake, ed., with co-researcher Ann Ebert-Oehlers. *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes*. Singapore: Times Editions Pte Ltd, 1992, pp. 25-35.

Broeze, Frank, editor. *Brides of the Sea: Port Cities of Asia from the 16<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989.

Brooke, Dr. Gilbert E. "Botanic Gardens and Economic Notes." In: Walter Makepeace, Gilbert E. Brooke, and Roland St. J. Braddell, editors. *One Hundred Years of Singapore*. London: John Murray, 1921. Republished with an Introduction by C.M. Turnbull: Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991, Volume Two, pp. 63-78.

Brown, C.C., translator. *Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals*. An annotated translation by C.C. Brown. Introduction by R. Roolvink. Kuala Lumpur and Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Brown, Edwin Arthur. *Indiscreet Memories*. London: Kelly & Walsh, 1935.

Brown, J. Macmillan. *The Dutch East: Sketches and Pictures*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., 1914.

Brown, Rajeswary Ampalavanar. *Capital and Entrepreneurship in South-East Asia*. Houndmills and London: Macmillan Press Ltd, and New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994.

Bryson, Lyman. "Circles of Prestige," Chapter V in: Lyman Bryson, Louis Finkelstein, Hudson Hoagland, and R.M. MacIver, editors, *Symbols and Society: Fourteenth Symposium of the Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion*, New York: Published by the Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion in Their Relation to the Democratic Way of Life, Inc., 1955, pp. 79-101.

Bryson, Lyman, Louis Finkelstein, Hudson Hoagland, and R.M. MacIver, editors, *Symbols and Society: Fourteenth Symposium of the Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion*, New York: Published by the Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion in Their Relation to the Democratic Way of Life, Inc., 1955.

## Bibliography

Buckley, Charles Burton. *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*. Singapore: Fraser & Neave, Limited, 1902. Republished with an Introduction by C.M. Turnbull: Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984.

Burke, Peter. *The Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society in Italy*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986.

Butcher, John G. *The British in Malaya 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979.

Butcher, John. "Loke Yew." In: John Butcher and Howard Dick, editors. *The Rise and Fall of Revenue Farming: Business Elites and the Emergence of the Modern State in Southeast Asia*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993, pp. 255-260.

Butcher, John, and Howard Dick, editors. *The Rise and Fall of Revenue Farming: Business Elites and the Emergence of the Modern State in Southeast Asia*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.

Caddy, Florence. *To Siam and Malaya in The Duke of Sutherland's Yacht 'Sans Peur'*. London: Hurst and Blackett, Limited, 1889.

Cain, P.J., and A.G. Hopkins. *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion 1688-1914*. London and New York: Longman, 1993.

Cain, P.J., and A.G. Hopkins. *British Imperialism: Crisis and Deconstruction 1914-1990*. London and New York: Longman, 1993.

Cameron, Charlotte. *Wanderings in South-Eastern Seas*. London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd, 1924.

Cameron, John. *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India: Being a Descriptive Account of Singapore, Penang, Province Wellesley, and Malacca; Their Peoples, Products, Commerce, and Government*. London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1865. Reprinted with an Introduction by Wang Gungwu: Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1965.

Cannadine, David. *Class in Britain*. London: Penguin Books, 1998.

Cannadine, David. "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition', c. 1820-1977." In: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, editors. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 101-164.

Cannadine, David. *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

## Bibliography

Cannadine, David, editor. *What is History Now?* Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.

Cardoza, Francisca, and Jacinta Cardoza. "They Made Their Mark: Prominent Eurasians in Singapore's History." In: Myrna Braga-Blake, ed., with co-researcher Ann Ebert-Oehlers. *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes*. Singapore: Times Editions Pte Ltd, 1992, pp. 81-95.

Carey, Peter. "The British in Java, 1811-1816: A Javanese Account." In: J. van Goor, ed. *Trading Companies in Asia 1600-1830*. Utrecht: HES Uitgevers, 1986, pp. 127-162.

Carlos, A.H. "Eurasian Volunteers." In: Walter Makepeace, Gilbert E. Brooke, and Roland St. J. Braddell, editors. *One Hundred Years of Singapore*. London: John Murray, 1921. Republished with an Introduction by C.M. Turnbull: Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991, Volume One, pp. 392-394.

Carr, E.H. *What Is History? The George Macaulay Trevelyan Lectures delivered in the University of Cambridge January-March 1961*. Second Edition. Edited by R.W. Davies. London: Macmillan, 1986.

Carroll, Christopher D. "Why Do the Rich Save So Much?" In: Joel B. Slemrod, editor. *Does Atlas Shrug? The Economic Consequences of Taxing the Rich*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 2000, pp. 465-484.

Carroll, John M. *Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 2005.

Cartledge, Paul. "What is Social History Now?" In: David Cannadine, ed. *What is History Now?* Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, pp. 19-35.

Cavenagh, General Sir Orfeur. *Reminiscences of an Indian Official*. London: W.H. Allen & Co., 1884. NUS Central Library Rare Books Collection Stack # R2823.

*Ceremonial Opening of the New Supreme Court Building Singapore by His Excellency Sir Shenton Thomas G.C.M.G., O.B.E. Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1939*. Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1939.

Chan Kwok Bun and Claire Chiang See Ngoh. *Stepping Out: The Making of Chinese Entrepreneurs*. Singapore: Prentice Hall, Simon & Schuster (Asia) Pte Ltd, 1994.

Chan Kwok Bun and Tong Chee Kiong, editors. *Past Times: A Social History of Singapore*. Singapore: Times Editions, 2003.

Chan Wai Kwan. *The Making of Hong Kong Society. Three Studies of Class Formation in Early Hong Kong*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.

## Bibliography

Charney, Michael W., Brenda S.A. Yeoh, and Tong Chee Kiong, editors. *Chinese Migrants Abroad: Cultural, Educational, and Social Dimensions of the Chinese Diaspora*. Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2003.

Chattopadhyay, Swati. *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism and the Colonial Uncanny*. New York: Routledge, 2005.

Ch'en, Jerome, and Nicholas Tarling, editors. *Studies in the Social History of China and South-East Asia: Essays in Memory of Victor Purcell*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970.

Chen Mong Hock. *The Early Chinese Newspapers of Singapore 1881-1912*. Singapore: University of Malaya Press, 1967.

Cherry, Rev. W.T. *Geography of British Malaya and the Malay Archipelago*. Fourth Edition. Singapore: Methodist Publishing House, 1923.

Chew, Daniel. "Towards a Social History of Tanjong Pagar 1900-1940." In: *Tanjong Pagar: Singapore's Cradle of Development*. Singapore: Tanjong Pagar Citizens' Consultative Committee, 1989, pp. 21-29.

Chew, Ernest C.T., and Edwin Lee, editors. *A History of Singapore*. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991, third impression 1997.

Chew, Ernest C.T. "The Foundation of a British Settlement," in: Ernest C.T. Chew and Edwin Lee, editors. *A History of Singapore*. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991, third impression 1997, pp. 36-40.

Chew, Ernest C.T. "Founders and Builders of Early Colonial Singapore." In: Irene Lim, editor. *Sketching the Straits: A Compilation of the Lecture Series on the Charles Dyce Collection*. Singapore: NUS Museums, 2004, pp. 23-31.

Chew, Melanie. *Leaders of Singapore*. Singapore: Resource Press, 1996.

Chew, Melanie. *Memories of the Fullerton*. Singapore: Fullerton Hotel, 2001.

Chiang Hai Ding. *A History of Straits Settlements Foreign Trade 1870-1915*. Singapore: National Museum, 1978.

Chiang Hai Ding. "Sino-British Mercantile Relations In Singapore's Entrepôt Trade 1870-1915," in: Jerome Ch'en and Nicholas Tarling, editors. *Studies in the Social History of China and South-East Asia: Essays in Memory of Victor Purcell*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970, pp. 247-266.

Chiang Ming Shun. "Britannia Rules the Waves? Singapore and Imperial Defence 1867-1891." In: Malcolm H. Murfett, John N. Miksic, Brian P. Farrell, and Chiang Ming

## Bibliography

Shun. *Between Two Oceans: A Military History of Singapore From First Settlement to Final British Withdrawal*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999, pp. 87-117.

Chiang Ming Shun. "The Weakest go to the Wall: From Money to Mutiny 1892-1918." In: Malcolm H. Murfett, John N. Miksic, Brian P. Farrell, and Chiang Ming Shun. *Between Two Oceans: A Military History of Singapore From First Settlement to Final British Withdrawal*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999, pp. 118-144.

Chua Beng-Huat. "Decoding the Political in Civic Spaces: An Interpretive Essay." In: Chua Beng-Huat and Norman Edwards, editors, *Public Space: Design, Use and Management*. Singapore: Published by the Singapore University Press for the Centre for Advanced Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, NUS, 1992, pp. 55-68.

Chua Beng Huat. "Erased Tropical Heritage: Residential Architecture and Environment." In: Chan Kwok Bun and Tong Chee Kiong, editors. *Past Times: A Social History of Singapore*. Singapore: Times Editions, 2003, pp. 87-101.

Chua Beng-Huat and Norman Edwards, editors. *Public Space: Design, Use and Management*. Singapore: Published by the Singapore University Press for the Centre for Advanced Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, NUS, 1992.

Chua Beng Huat and Kwok Kian-Woon. "Social Pluralism in Singapore." In: Robert W. Hefner, editor. *The Politics of Multiculturalism: Pluralism and Citizenship in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001, pp. 86-118.

Clawson, Dan, editor. *Required Reading: Sociology's Most Influential Books*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998.

Clifford, Hugh. *Further India: Being The Story of Exploration from the Earliest Times in Burma, Malaya, Siam, and Indo-China*. London: Alston Rivers, Limited, 1905.

Coates, Austin. *The Commerce in Rubber: The First 250 Years*. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Cohn, Bernard S. *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays*. With an Introduction by Ranajit Guha. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Cohn, Bernard S. "History and Anthropology: The State of Play." In: Bernard S. Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 18-49.

Cohn, Bernard S. "Representing Authority in Victorian India." In: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, editors. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 165-209. This essay is also in: Bernard S. Cohn. *An Anthropologist*

## Bibliography

*among the Historians and Other Essays*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 632-682.

Coleman, James S. *Foundations of Social Theory*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990.

Colley, Linda. *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992.

Colley, Linda. "What is Imperial History Now?" In: David Cannadine, editor. *What is History Now?* Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, pp. 132-147.

Collins, Randall. "Interaction Ritual Chains, Power and Property: The Micro-Macro Connection as an Empirically Based Theoretical Problem." In: Jeffrey C. Alexander, Bernhard Giesen, Richard Munch, and Neil J. Smelser, editors. *The Micro-Macro Link*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1987, pp. 193-206.

Cook, Rev. J.A. Bethune. *Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles Kt., LL.D., F.R.S. Founder of Singapore 1819 and Some of his Friends and Contemporaries*. London: Arthur H. Stockwell, 1918.

Cook, Rev. J.A. Bethune. *Sunny Singapore: An Account of the Place and its People, with a Sketch of the Results of Missionary Work*. Second Edition. London: Elliot Stock, 1907.

Cooley, Charles Horton. *Human Nature and the Social Order*. New York, Chicago, and Boston: Charles Scribner's Sons, originally published in 1902, Revised Edition 1922.

Copland, Ian. *The Burden of Empire: Perspectives on Imperialism and Colonialism*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Corner, E.J.H. *The Marquis: A Tale of Syonan-to*. Singapore: Heinemann Educational Books (Asia) Ltd, 1981.

Cowan, C.D., editor. *The Economic Development of South-East Asia: Studies in Economic History and Political Economy*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1964.

Crawford, J. *A Diary kept on Board the Honourable Company's Surveying Ship INVESTIGATOR by J. Crawford, her Commander. 24<sup>th</sup> November, 1818 – 18<sup>th</sup> August, 1819*. Typescript in the NUS Central Library Singapore-Malaysia Collection, DS 592 Cra.

Cree, Edward H. *The Cree Journals: The Voyages of Edward H. Cree, Surgeon R.N., as Related in His Private Journals, 1837-1856*. Edited and with an Introduction by Michael Levien. Exeter, England: Webb & Bower (Publishers) Limited, 1981.

## Bibliography

Cresson, Leo, assisted by Walter Rintoul, Keki Medora, and Kitty Aeria. *Rotary Club of Singapore 1930-1980*. Singapore: Rotary Club of Singapore, 1980.

Cross, the Rev. William. "Stamford Raffles – The Man." In: Walter Makepeace, Gilbert E. Brooke, and Roland St. J. Braddell, editors. *One Hundred Years of Singapore*. London: John Murray, 1921. Republished with an Introduction by C.M. Turnbull: Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991, Volume One, pp. 32-68.

Curle, Richard. *Into the East: Notes on Burma and Malaya*. London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1923.

Davison, Julian. *Allen & Gledhill Centenary*. Singapore: Topographica, 2002.

Del Tufo, M.V. *Malaya Comprising the Federation of Malaya and the Colony of Singapore: A Report on the 1947 Census of Population*. London: The Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1949.

Derrick, G.A., Lieutenant-Colonel. "Singapore Volunteers." In: Walter Makepeace, Gilbert E. Brooke, and Roland St. J. Braddell, editors. *One Hundred Years of Singapore*. London: John Murray, 1921. Republished with an Introduction by C.M. Turnbull: Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991, Volume One, pp. 384-391.

Dhoraisingam, Kamala Devi, and Dhoraisingam S. Samuel. *Tan Tock Seng: Pioneer: His Life, Times, Contributions and Legacy*. Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia: Natural History Publications (Borneo), 2003.

Dietler, Michael. "Theorizing the Feast: Rituals of Consumption, Commensal Politics, and Power in African Contexts." In: Michael Dietler and Brian Hayden, editors. *Feasts: Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics, and Power*. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001, pp. 65-114.

Dietler, Michael, and Brian Hayden, editors. *Feasts: Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics, and Power*. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001.

Domhoff, G. William. *The Higher Circles: The Governing Class in America*. New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, 1971.

Dossett, J.W., compiler. *Who's Who in Malaya 1918*. Singapore: Dossett & Co., 1918. Singapore National Library microfilm reel NL 5829.

Dovey, Kim. *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form*. London and New York: Routledge, 1999.



## Bibliography

Dovey, Kim. "The Silent Complicity of Architecture." In: Jean Hillier and Emma Rooksby, editors. *Habitus: A Sense of Place*. Aldershot, Burlington, Singapore, and Sydney: Ashgate, 2002, pp. 267- 280.

Drysdale, John. *Singapore: Struggle for Success*. Singapore: Times Books International, Singapore, 1984.

Duncan, Walter Scott. *Singapore Sixty Years Ago; Including Journal by Mr. Walter Scott Duncan, February to June, 1824*. Reprinted from the *Straits Times*. Singapore: Straits Times Press, 1883. (This journal is preserved in Singapore National Library microfilm reel NL 5406, which is labelled "Sri Poestaka.")

Dunlop, Peter K.G. *Street Names of Singapore*. Singapore: Who's Who Publishing, 2000.

Durkheim, Émile. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Translated by Joseph Ward Swain, with an introduction by Robert Nisbet. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., first published in 1915, Second Edition 1976.

Earl, George Windsor. *The Eastern Seas, or Voyages and Adventures in the Indian Archipelago, in 1832-33-34, Comprising A Tour of the Island of Java – Visits to Borneo, the Malay Peninsula, Siam, &c.; also An Account of the Present State of Singapore, With Observations on the Commercial Resources of the Archipelago*. London: Wm. H. Allen and Co., 1837, republished by Oxford University Press, Singapore, 1971.

Earley, P. Christopher. *Face, Harmony, and Social Structure: An Analysis of Organizational Behaviour across Cultures*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Edwards, Norman. "The Colonial Suburb: Public Space as Private Space." In: Chua Beng-Huat and Norman Edwards, editors. *Public Space: Design, Use and Management*. Singapore: Published by the Singapore University Press for the Centre for Advanced Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, NUS, 1992, pp. 24-39.

Edwards, Norman, and Peter Keys. *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*. Singapore and Kuala Lumpur: Times Books International, 1988.

Ehlers, Otto Ehrenfried. *On Horseback through Indochina Volume 3. Vietnam, Singapore, and Central Thailand*. An English translation of *Im Sattel durch Indo-China*, translated by Walter E.J. Tips. Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2002.

Ekeh, Peter P. *Social Exchange Theory: The Two Traditions*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1974.

Emerson, Rupert. *From Empire to Nation: The Rise to Self-Assertion of Asian and African Peoples*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962.

## Bibliography

*Encyclopædia Britannica* 2002 Deluxe Edition CD-ROM.

Evers, Hans-Dieter, and Jayarani Pavadarayan. "Religious Fervour and Economic Success: The Chettiars of Singapore." In: K.S. Sandhu and A. Mani, editors. *Indian Communities in Southeast Asia*. Singapore: Times Academic Press and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993, pp. 847-865.

Feldwick, W., editor-in-chief. *Present Day Impressions of the Far East and Prominent and Progressive Chinese at Home and Abroad: The History, People, Commerce, Industries and resources of China, Hongkong, Indo-China, Malaya and Netherlands India*. London, Shanghai, Hongkong, Saigon, Singapore & Batavia: The Globe Encyclopedia Company, 1917. NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0025824.

Fenn, Richard K. *Beyond Idols: The Shape of a Secular Society*. Oxford, New York, et al.: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Field, S.E. *Singapore Tragedy*. Sydney and London: Angus and Robertson Ltd, 1943.

Fisher, Julius S., editor. *Who's Who in Malaya 1925*. Singapore: Julius S. Fisher, 1925. Singapore National Library microfilm reel NL 6705.

Fisher, Julius S., editor. *Who's Who in Malaya 1939*. Singapore: Fishers Limited, 1939.

Foran, W. Robert. *Malayan Symphony: Being the impressions gathered during a six months' journey through the Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States, Siam, Sumatra, Java and Bali*. London: Hutchinson & Co., 1935.

Freedman, Maurice. *Chinese Family and Marriage in Singapore*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1957.

Freedman, Maurice. "The Growth of a Plural Society in Malaya." In: Immanuel Wallerstein, editor. *Social Change: The Colonial Situation*. New York, London, and Sydney: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1966, pp. 278-289. (Originally published in: *Pacific Affairs*, XXXIII, 2, 1960, pp. 158-168.)

Freedman, Maurice. "Immigrants and Associations: Chinese in Nineteenth-Century Singapore." In: Maurice Freedman. *The Study of Chinese Society: Essays by Maurice Freedman*. Selected and Introduced by G. William Skinner. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979, pp. 61-83.

Freedman, Maurice. *The Study of Chinese Society: Essays by Maurice Freedman*. Selected and Introduced by G. William Skinner. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979.

## Bibliography

Freitag, Ulrike. "Arab Merchants in Singapore: Attempt of a Collective Biography." In: Huub de Jonge and Nico Kaptein, editors. *Transcending Borders: Arabs, Politics, Trade and Islam in Southeast Asia*. Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002, pp. 109-142.

Fujitani, Takashi. *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996.

Fuller, Robert W. *Somebodies and Nobodies: Overcoming the Abuse of Rank*. Gabriola Island, British Columbia: New Society Publishers, 2003.

Furnivall, J.S. *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948.

Furnivall, J.S. *Netherlands India: A Study of Plural Economy*. With an Introduction by Jonkheer Mr. A.C.D. de Graeff, Governor-General of Netherlands India, 1926-31. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939.

Geertz, Clifford. "Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power." In: Sean Wilentz, ed. *Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual, and Politics Since the Middle Ages*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, pp. 13-38.

Geertz, Clifford. "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight." In: Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1973, pp. 412-453.

Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1973.

Geertz, Clifford. *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980.

Geertz, Clifford. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." In: Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1973, pp. 3-30.

German, Captain R.L. *Handbook to British Malaya. 1926*. London: The Malay States Information Agency, 1926. NUS Central Library Rare Books Collection, Stack # R5737, DS 592 Han.

Gerth, Hans, and C. Wright Mills. *Character and Social Structure: The Psychology of Social Institutions*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1954.

Gillis, E. Kay. *Singapore Civil Society and British Power*. Singapore: Talisman Publishing Ltd, 2005.

Gilmour, O.W. *With Freedom to Singapore*. London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1950.

## Bibliography

Goode, William J. *The Celebration of Heroes: Prestige as a Social Control System*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1978.

Goor, J. van, ed. *Trading Companies in Asia 1600-1830*. Utrecht: HES Uitgevers, 1986.

Gopinathan, S., Ho Wah Kam, and Vanithamani Saravanan. "Ethnicity Management and Language Education Policy: Towards a Modified Model of Language Education in Singapore Schools." In: Lai Ah Eng, editor. *Beyond Rituals and Riots: Ethnic Pluralism and Social Cohesion in Singapore*. Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2004, pp. 228-257.

Granovetter, Mark, and Richard Swedberg, editors., *The Sociology of Economic Life*. Second Edition. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2001.

Griffith-Jones, Lionel. *That's My Lot: An Anecdotal Autobiography of a British Ex-Singapore Colonial*. New York: Vantage Press, Inc., 1984.

Grint, Keith, editor. *Leadership: Classical, Contemporary, and Critical Approaches*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 70-81.

Grusky, David B., editor. *Social Stratification: Class, Race, and Gender in Sociological Perspective*. Second edition. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2001.

Guillemard, Sir Laurence. *Trivial Fond Records*. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1937.

Hallifax, F.J. "Municipal Government." In: Walter Makepeace, Gilbert E. Brooke, and Roland St. J. Braddell, editors. *One Hundred Years of Singapore*. London: John Murray, 1921. Republished with an Introduction by C.M. Turnbull: Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991, Volume One, pp. 315-340.

*A Handbook Of Information Presented By The Rotary Club And The Municipal Commissioners Of The Town Of Singapore*. Singapore: Printers Limited, 1933.

Hefner, Robert W. "Introduction: Multiculturalism and Citizenship in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia." In: Robert W. Hefner, editor. *The Politics of Multiculturalism: Pluralism and Citizenship in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001, pp. 1-58.

Hefner, Robert W., editor. *The Politics of Multiculturalism: Pluralism and Citizenship in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001.

Helfferrich, Emil. *A Company History: Behn, Meyer & Co. founded in Singapore November 1, 1840 and Arnold Otto Meyer founded in Hamburg June 1, 1857*. Volume I was originally published in the German language in 1957. English edition, translated by Heidi Hartmann: Hamburg: Hans Christians Verlag, 1981. Volume II was originally

## Bibliography

published in the German language in 1967. English edition: Hamburg: Hans Christians Verlag, 1983.

Heussler, Robert. *British Rule in Malaya: The Malayan Civil Service and Its Predecessors, 1867-1942*. Oxford: Clio Press Ltd, 1981.

Hillier, Jean, and Emma Rooksby, editors. *Habitus: A Sense of Place*. Aldershot, Burlington, Singapore, and Sydney: Ashgate, 2002.

Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. Originally published in 1651; edited and abridged with an introduction by John Plamenatz. London: Collins, 1967.

Hobsbawm, Eric. "Introduction: Inventing Traditions." In: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, editors. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 1-14.

Hobsbawm, Eric. "Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914." In: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, editors. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 263-307.

Hobsbawm, E.J. (Eric John). *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger, editors. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Hooker, Virginia Matheson, and M.B. Hooker. *John Leyden's Malay Annals*. With an Introductory Essay by Virginia Matheson Hooker and M.B. Hooker. Malaysia: MBRAS, 2001.

Hornaday, William T. *Two Years in the Jungle: The Experiences of a Hunter and Naturalist in India, Ceylon, the Malay Peninsula and Borneo*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1885. Reprinted in part, with an Introduction by J.M. Gullick, as: *The Experiences of a Hunter and Naturalist in the Malay Peninsula and Borneo*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Howell, Signe, and Roy Willis, editors. *Societies at Peace: Anthropological Perspectives*. London and New York: Routledge, 1989.

Huff, W.G. *The Economic Growth of Singapore: Trade and Development in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Hunter, William C. *Bits of Old China*. Taipei: Ch'eng-wen Publishing Company, 1966. Originally published by Kegan Paul, Trench, & Co., London, in 1855.

## Bibliography

Hutton, Wendy. *The Singapore Polo Club: An Informal History 1886-1982*. Singapore: Girdwood Enterprises, 1983.

Ismail Kassim. *Problems of Elite Cohesion: A Perspective from a Minority Community*. Singapore University Press, 1974.

Jarman, Robert L., editor. *Annual Reports of the Straits Settlements 1855-1941*. United Kingdom: Archive Editions, 1998.

Jarvie, I.C., editor, in consultation with Joseph Agassi. *Hong Kong: A Society in Transition*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969.

Jenkins, Richard. *Pierre Bourdieu*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.

Jonge, Huub de, and Nico Kaptein, editors. *Transcending Borders: Arabs, Politics, Trade and Islam in Southeast Asia*. Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002.

Joyce, Patrick, editor. *Class*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Jumabhoy, Rajabali. *Multiracial Singapore – On to the Nineties*. Singapore: Chopmen Publishers, 1990.

Keaughran, T.J. *Picturesque and Busy Singapore*. Singapore: Printed at the “Lat Pau” Press, 1887. Singapore National Library microfilm NL 5829.

Keaughran, T.J. *The Singapore Directory for the Straits Settlements, 1879*. Singapore: Published by T.J. Keaughran, 1879.

Keith, A. Berriedale. *The King and the Imperial Crown: The Powers and Duties of His Majesty*. London, New York, and Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1936.

Kennedy, Paul. *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*. London: Fontana Press, 1989.

Keppel, Admiral of the Fleet the Hon. Sir Henry. *A Sailor’s Life Under Four Sovereigns*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1899.

Khoo Joo Ee. *The Straits Chinese: A Cultural History*. Amsterdam and Kuala Lumpur: The Pepin Press, 1996.

Khoo Kay Kim, Elinah Abdullah, and Wan Meng Hao, editors. *Malays / Muslims in Singapore: Selected Readings in History, 1819-1965*. Singapore: Commissioned by the Association of Muslim Professionals, 2006.

Kinser, Samuel. *Carnival, American Style: Mardi Gras at New Orleans and Mobile*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990.

## Bibliography

Kipling, Rudyard. *From Sea to Sea and Other Sketches*. E-text at: <http://whitewolf.newcastle.edu.au/words/authors/K/KiplingRudyard/prose/FromSeaToS...> (Accessed April 5, 2006.)

Kraft, Julius. Introduction. In: Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Use and Abuse of History*. Translated by Adrian Collins. Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., Second Revised Edition, 1957, pp. vii-ix.

Kratoska, Paul H., editor. *Honourable Intentions: Talks on the British Empire in South-East Asia delivered at the Royal Colonial Institute 1874-1928*. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1983.

Kratoska, Paul H. *Index to British Colonial Office Files Pertaining to British Malaya*. Kuala Lumpur: Arkib Negara Malaysia, 1990.

Krishnan, R.B. *Indians in Malaya: A Pageant of Greater India: A Rapid Survey of Over 2,000 Years of Maritime and Colonising Activities Across The Bay of Bengal*. With a Foreword by The Hon. Mr. S.N. Veerasamy, J.P., M.F.C., M.S.C. Singapore: The Malayan Publishers, 1936.

Kwa Chong Guan. "From Temasek to Singapore: Locating a Global City-State in the Cycles of Melaka Straits History." In: John N. Miksic and Cheryl-Ann Low Mei Gek, general editors. *Early Singapore 1300s – 1819: Evidence in Maps, Text and Artefacts*. Singapore: Singapore History Museum, 2004, pp. 124-146.

Kwa Chong Guan. "Sailing Past Singapore." In: Miksic, John N., and Cheryl-Ann Low Mei Gek, general editors. *Early Singapore 1300s – 1819: Evidence in Maps, Text and Artefacts*. Singapore: Singapore History Museum, 2004, pp. 95-105.

Lai Ah Eng, editor. *Beyond Rituals and Riots: Ethnic Pluralism and Social Cohesion in Singapore*. Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2004.

Lai Ah Eng. "Introduction: Beyond Rituals and Riots." In: Lai Ah Eng, editor. *Beyond Rituals and Riots: Ethnic Pluralism and Social Cohesion in Singapore*. Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2004, pp. 1-40.

Lai Ah Eng. *Meanings of Multiethnicity: A Case-study of Ethnicity and Ethnic Relations in Singapore*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Lau Siu-kai. *Society and Politics in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1982.

*The Laws of the Straits Settlements Edition of 1936. In Five Volumes*. Singapore: Government Printing Office, Singapore, 1936.

## Bibliography

Leach, Neil. "Belonging: Towards a Theory of Identification with Space." In: Jean Hillier and Emma Rooksby, editors. *Habitus: A Sense of Place*. Aldershot, Burlington, Singapore, and Sydney: Ashgate, 2002, pp. 281-295.

Lee, Edwin. *The British As Rulers: Governing Multiracial Singapore 1867-1914*. Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1991.

Lee, Edwin. "The Colonial Legacy." In: Kernial Singh Sandhu and Paul Wheatley, editors. *Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989, pp. 3-50.

Lee, Edwin. "Community, Family, and Household." In: Ernest C. T. Chew and Edwin Lee, editors. *A History of Singapore*. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991, third impression 1997, pp. 242-267.

Lee, Edwin. *Historic Buildings of Singapore*. Singapore: Preservation of Monuments Board, 1990.

Lee, Edwin, and Tan Tai Yong. *Beyond Degrees: The Making of the National University of Singapore*. Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1996.

Lee Kam Hing. "The Emergence of Modern Chinese Business in Malaya: The Case of the Straits Chinese and the Oversea-Chinese Banking Corporation." In: Leo Suryadinata, ed., *Ethnic Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia: A Dialogue between Tradition and Modernity*. Singapore: Times Academic Press, 2002, pp. 219-254.

Lee Kip Lee. *Amber Sands: A Boyhood Memoir*. Singapore: Federal Publications (S) Pte Ltd, 1995.

Lee Kip Lin. *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*. Edited by Gretchen Liu. Designed by Kathleen Lau. Singapore: Times Editions, 1988.

Lee Kuan Yew. *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew*. Singapore: Times Editions Pte Ltd (a member of the Times Publishing Group) and The Straits Times Press (a member of Singapore Press Holdings), 1998.

Lee Poh Ping. *Chinese Society in Nineteenth Century Singapore*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Lee Sheng-Yi. *The Monetary and Banking Development of Malaysia and Singapore*. Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1974.

Leicester, Henry Barnaby. "Personal Recollections." In: Walter Makepeace, Gilbert E. Brooke, and Roland St. J. Braddell, editors. *One Hundred Years of Singapore*. London: John Murray, 1921. Republished with an Introduction by C.M. Turnbull: Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991, Volume Two, pp. 525-536.



## Bibliography

Lenski, Gerhard E. *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966.

Lethbridge, Henry J. "Hong Kong Under Japanese Occupation: Changes in Social Structure." In: I.C. Jarvie, editor, in consultation with Joseph Agassi. *Hong Kong: A Society in Transition*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969, pp. 77-127.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *The Elementary Structures of Kinship (Les Structures Élémentaires de la Parenté)*. Revised Edition Translated from the French by James Harle Bell, John Richard von Sturmer and Rodney Needham, editor. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.

Leyden, John. *Malay Annals: Translated from the Malay Language, by the late Dr John Leyden*. With an Introduction, by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, F.R.S., &c. &c. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1821. Reprinted in: Virginia Matheson Hooker and M.B. Hooker, *John Leyden's Malay Annals*. With an Introductory Essay by Virginia Matheson Hooker and M.B. Hooker. Malaysia: MBRAS, 2001.

Li Dun Jen. *British Malaya: An Economic Analysis*. Second (Revised) Edition. Kuala Lumpur: Institut Analisa Sosial (Institute for Social Analysis), 1982.

Lian Kwen Fee and Ananda Rajah. " 'Race' and Ethnic Relations in Singapore." In: Tong Chee Kiong & Lian Kwen Fee, editors. *The Making of Singapore Sociology: Society and State*. Singapore: Times Academic Press in association with Brill Academic Publishers, 2002, pp. 221-246.

Lien Ying Chow with Louis Kraar. *From Chinese Villager to Singapore Tycoon: My Life Story*. Singapore and Kuala Lumpur: Times Books International, 1992.

Lijphart, Arend. *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968.

Lim Boon Keng. "The Chinese in Malaya." In: W. Feldwick, editor-in-chief. *Present Day Impressions of the Far East and Prominent and Progressive Chinese at Home and Abroad: The History, People, Commerce, Industries and resources of China, Hongkong, Indo-China, Malaya and Netherlands India*. London, Shanghai, Hongkong, Saigon, Singapore & Batavia: The Globe Encyclopedia Company, 1917, pp. 875-882. NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0025824.

Lim Boon Keng. *The Great War from The Confucian Point of View, and Kindred Topics. Being Lectures Delivered During 1914-1917*. With an Introduction by A.W. Still. Singapore: The Straits Albion Press, Ltd., 1917. Singapore National Library microfilm reel NL 5829.

## Bibliography

- Lim Boon Keng. "Race and Empire with special reference to British Malaya." In: Lim Boon Keng. *The Great War from The Confucian Point of View, and Kindred Topics. Being Lectures Delivered During 1914-1917.* With an Introduction by A.W. Still. Singapore: The Straits Albion Press, Ltd., 1917, pp. 98-115. Singapore National Library microfilm reel NL 5829.
- Lim, Irene, editor. *Sketching the Straits: A Compilation of the Lecture Series on the Charles Dyce Collection.* Singapore: NUS Museums, 2004.
- Lim Kay Tong. *Cathay: 55 Years of Cinema.* Singapore: Landmark Books for Meileen Choo, 1991.
- Lim Kuang Hui. *In the Chair of King Solomon.* Singapore: Lim Kuang Hui, 1995.
- Lin, Nan. "Guanxi: A Conceptual Analysis." In: Alvin Y. So, Nan Lin, and Dudley Poston, editors. *The Chinese Triangle of Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong: Comparative Institutional Analyses.* Westport, Connecticut, and London: Greenwood Press, 2001, pp. 153-166.
- Lin, Nan. *Social Capital: A Theory of Social Structure and Action.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Lim Pui Huen, Datin Patricia. *Wong Ah Fook: Immigrant, Builder and Entrepreneur.* Singapore: Times Editions, 2002.
- Lim Pui Huen, Datin Patricia. *The Tan Cheng Lock Papers: A Descriptive List. A New and Enlarged Edition.* Compiled by P. Lim Pui Huen with the assistance of Mercedes Cheong. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989.
- Liu, Hong, and Sin-Kiong Wong. *Singapore Chinese Society in Transition: Business, Politics, & Socio-Economic Change, 1945-1965.* New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2004.
- Lockhart, Sir Robert Hamilton Bruce. *Return to Malaya.* London: Putnam, 1936.
- Lo Wai Ping and Lim Jen Hui. "The Development of Land Registration in Singapore." In: Kevin Y.L. Tan, editor. *Essays in Singapore Legal History.* Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic and the Singapore Academy of Law, 2005, pp. 217-243.
- Loh, Grace, and Lee Su Yin. *Beyond Silken Robes: Profiles of Selected Chinese Entrepreneurs in Singapore.* Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1998.
- Low, D.A. *Lion Rampant: Essays in the Study of British Imperialism.* London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1973.

## Bibliography

Low Ngiong Ing. *Recollections: Chinese Jetsam on a Tropic Shore When Singapore was Syonan-to*. Singapore: Eastern Universities Press Sdn. Bhd., 1983.

Low Yit Leng. "Noble Houses: Surviving Colonial Estates of Yesteryear." In: *Singapore Chronicles: A Special Commemorative History of Singapore Published by Singapore Tatler on the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Republic*. Hong Kong: Illustrated Magazine Publishing, 1995, pp. 146-151.

Low Yit Leng. "Uniform Success: Singapore's Top Schools." In: *Singapore Chronicles: A Special Commemorative History of Singapore Published by Singapore Tatler on the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Republic*. Hong Kong: Illustrated Magazine Publishing, 1995, pp. 194-201.

Lukes, Steven. *Essays in Social Theory*. London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1977.

Lukes, Steven. "Political Ritual and Social Integration." In: Steven Lukes. *Essays in Social Theory*. London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1977, pp. 52-73.

Luscombe, F.M. *Singapore 1819-1930*. With a Foreword by Dr. Gilbert E. Brooke. Singapore: C.A. Ribeiro & Co., Ltd., 1930.

Macbeth, Mike. *Quiet Achiever: The Life and Times of Tan Sri Dr. Tan Chin Tuan*. Singapore: Times Editions, 2003.

Machiavelli, Niccolò. *The Prince*. Translated and edited by Thomas G. Bergin. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1947.

Mackenzie, Sir Compton. *Realms of Silver: One Hundred Years of Banking in the East*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954.

Mackie, Jamie. "Chinese Entrepreneurs in Malaysia: Traditional and Modern." In: Leo Suryadinata, editor. *Ethnic Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia: A Dialogue between Tradition and Modernity*. Singapore: Times Academic Press, 2002, pp. 175-194.

Mak Lau Fong. "Convergence and Divergence: The Developmental Patterns of the Chinese Traditional Voluntary Associations in Singapore." In: Yong Mun Cheong, editor. *Asian Traditions and Modernization: Perspectives from Singapore*. Singapore: Times Academic Press for the Centre for Advanced Studies, 1992, pp. 31-55.

Makepeace, Walter. "Concerning Known Persons." In: Walter Makepeace, Dr. Gilbert E. Brooke, and Roland St. J. Braddell, editors. *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, London: John Murray, 1921. Republished with an Introduction by C.M. Turnbull: Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991, Volume Two, pp. 416-464.

## Bibliography

Makepeace, Walter. "Institutions and Clubs." In: Walter Makepeace, Gilbert E. Brooke, and Roland St. J. Braddell, editors. *One Hundred Years of Singapore*. London: John Murray, 1921. Republished with an Introduction by C.M. Turnbull: Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991, Volume Two, Chapter XVII, pp. 278-319.

Makepeace, Walter, Gilbert E. Brooke, and Roland St. J. Braddell, editors. *One Hundred Years of Singapore*. London: John Murray, 1921. Republished with an Introduction by C.M. Turnbull: Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Malinowski, Bronislaw. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., first published 1922, seventh impression 1966.

Mangan, J.A., and Fan Hong, editors. *Sport in Asian Society: Past and Present*. London and Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003.

Mani, Lawrence G., editor. *Fifty Eight Years of Enterprise: Souvenir volume of the new building of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce – 1964*. Singapore: L.M. Creative Publicity Ltd., 1964.

Marriott, Sir Hayes. "Inhabitants and Population." In: Walter Makepeace, Gilbert E. Brooke, and Roland St. J. Braddell, editors. *One Hundred Years of Singapore*. London: John Murray, 1921. Republished with an Introduction by C.M. Turnbull: Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991, Volume One, pp. 341-362.

Marshall, Gordon, editor. *A Dictionary of Sociology*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, second edition, 1998.

Marshall, P.J., editor. *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Empire*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Martin, James H., ed. *H.M. King George V Silver Jubilee May 3<sup>rd</sup> – May 11<sup>th</sup> 1935 Souvenir Programme*. T.B. Rogers & Co., Ltd., 1935. Singapore National Library microfilm reel NL 11186.

Maslow, A.H. "A Theory of Human Motivation." In: Jay M. Shafritz and Albert C. Hyde, editors. *Classics of Public Administration*. Third Edition. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1992, pp. 129-137. (Reprinted from *Psychological Review*, 50 (July 1943), pp. 370-396.)

Mauss, Marcel. *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*. An English translation of *Essai sur le don, forme archaïque de l'échange* (1925), translated by Ian Cunnison. Introduction by E.E. Evans-Pritchard. London: Cohen & West Ltd., 1966.

## Bibliography

Maxwell, Sir George, et al. *The Civil Defence of Malaya: A Narrative of the Part Taken In It by the Civilian Population of the Country in the Japanese Invasion*. London, New York, and Melbourne: Hutchinson & Co. (Publishers) Ltd., 1943?

McGregor, Douglas Murray. "The Human Side of Enterprise." In: Jay M. Shafritz and Albert C. Hyde, editors. *Classics of Public Administration*. Third Edition. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1992, pp. 217-223. (Reprinted from *Management Review*, November 1957.)

McKie, R.C.H. *This Was Singapore*. Sydney and London: Angus & Robertson, 1942.

McQuarie, Donald, editor. *Readings in Contemporary Sociological Theory: From Modernity to Post-Modernity*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1995.

Menkhoff, Thomas. *Trade Routes, Trust and Trading Networks – Chinese Small Enterprises in Singapore*. Saarbrücken and Fort Lauderdale: Verlag Breitenbach Publishers, 1993.

Merton, Robert K. "The Matthew Effect in Science." In: Robert K. Merton, *The Sociology of Science: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations*. Edited and with an Introduction by Norman W. Storer. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974, pp. 439-459.

Merton, Robert K. *The Sociology of Science: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations*. Edited and with an Introduction by Norman W. Storer. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974.

Michels, Robert. *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*. Translated by Eden and Cedar Paul. Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, first published in 1915, reprinted in 1949.

Michener, James A. *The Voice of Asia*. New York: Random House, 1951.

Michener, James A. *Voices of Asia*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1952.

Miksic, John N. "14<sup>th</sup>-Century Singapore: A Port of Trade." In: John N. Miksic and Cheryl-Ann Low Mei Gek, general editors. *Early Singapore 1300s – 1819: Evidence in Maps, Text and Artefacts*. Singapore: Singapore History Museum, 2004, pp. 41-54.

Miksic, John N. "From Fieldworks to Fort Canning 1823-1866." In: Malcolm H. Murfett, John N. Miksic, Brian P. Farrell, and Chiang Ming Shun. *Between Two Oceans: A Military History of Singapore From First Settlement to Final British Withdrawal*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999, pp. 53-86.

## Bibliography

- Miksic, John N., and Cheryl-Ann Low Mei Gek, general editors. *Early Singapore 1300s – 1819: Evidence in Maps, Text and Artefacts*. Singapore: Singapore History Museum, 2004.
- Mills, C. Wright. *The Power Elite*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1956; fifth printing, 1963.
- Mills, C. Wright. *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1959.
- Milner, Anthony C. *Kerajaan: Malay Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule*. Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press for the Association for Asian Studies, 1982.
- Monypenny, W.F. “The Imperial Ideal.” In: *The Empire and the Century: A Series of Essays on Imperial Problems and Possibilities by Various Writers*. With an Introduction by Charles Sydney Goldman. London: John Murray, 1905, pp. 5-28.
- Moor, J.H. *Notices of the Indian Archipelago and Adjacent Countries*. Singapore: 1837. (The publisher was not listed on the original title page.) Reprinted: London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1968.
- Morais, J. Victor, editor. *The Who's Who in Malaysia 1963*. Kuala Lumpur: published by J. Victor Morais, 1963.
- Moreira, Allan E. *The Malaya Sports Record Edition 1922-23*. Kuala Lumpur: Huxley, Palmer & Co., Ltd., 1923 (?).
- Morris, Jan. *Hong Kong*. London: Viking, 1988.
- Morris, James. *Pax Britannica: The Climax of an Empire*. London: Faber and Faber, 1968.
- Mosca, Gaetano. “The Ruling Class.” In: David B. Grusky, editor, *Social Stratification: Class, Race, and Gender in Sociological Perspective*. Second edition. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2001, pp. 195-201.
- Mountbatten, Admiral the Lord Louis. *Personal Diary of Admiral the Lord Louis Mountbatten Supreme Allied Commander, South-East Asia, 1943-1946*. Edited by Philip Ziegler. London: Collins, 1988.
- Murfett, Malcolm H. “A Keystone of Imperial Defence or a Millstone around Britain's Neck? Singapore 1919-1941.” In: Malcolm H. Murfett, John N. Miksic, Brian P. Farrell, and Chiang Ming Shun. *Between Two Oceans: A Military History of Singapore From First Settlement to Final British Withdrawal*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999, pp. 145-174.

## Bibliography

Murfett, Malcolm H. "Living under the Rising Sun: Singapore and the Japanese Occupation 1942-1945." In: Malcolm H. Murfett, John N. Miksic, Brian P. Farrell, and Chiang Ming Shun. *Between Two Oceans: A Military History of Singapore From First Settlement to Final British Withdrawal*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999, pp. 248-279.

Murfett, Malcolm H., John N. Miksic, Brian P. Farrell, and Chiang Ming Shun. *Between Two Oceans: A Military History of Singapore From First Settlement to Final British Withdrawal*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999.

Murphey, Rhoads. "On the Evolution of the Port City." In: Frank Broeze, editor. *Brides of the Sea: Port Cities of Asia from the 16<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989, pp. 223-245.

Mydin, Iskandar. "A Tragic Afternoon: The Kreta Ayer Incident." In: *Tanjong Pagar: Singapore's Cradle of Development*. Singapore: Tanjong Pagar Citizens' Consultative Committee, 1989, pp. 99-103.

Mydin, Iskandar. "The Singapore Malay / Muslim Community: Nucleus of Modernity." In: Khoo Kay Kim, Elinah Abdullah, and Wan Meng Hao, editors. *Malays / Muslims in Singapore: Selected Readings in History, 1819-1965*. Singapore: Commissioned by the Association of Muslim Professionals, 2006, pp. 113-157.

Nathan, Eze. *The History of Jews in Singapore 1830-1945*. Singapore: HERBILU Editorial & Marketing Services, 1986.

Nathan, J.E. *The Census of British Malaya (The Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States and Protected States of Johore, Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, Trengganu and Brunei) 1921*. London: Waterlow & Sons Limited, 1922.

Netto, Leslie. *Passage of Indians*. Singapore: Singapore Indian Association, 2003.

*The New Atlas and Commercial Gazetteer of the Straits Settlements and Federated Malay States: A work devoted to Its Geography, History, Resources and Economic and Commercial Development*. Compiled and Edited by the Staff of the Far Eastern Geographical Establishment. Singapore, Hongkong, Shanghai & Yokohama: Kelly & Walsh, Limited, 1917. NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0030259.

Newbold, T.J. *Political and Statistical Account of the British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca, viz. Pinang, Malacca, and Singapore; With a History of the Malayan States on the Peninsula of Malacca*. Volume I. London: John Murray, 1839. Reprinted with an Introduction by C.M. Turnbull, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1971.

## Bibliography

“Ngee Ann Kongs (Incorporation) Ordinance.” In: *The Laws of the Straits Settlements Edition of 1936. In Five Volumes*. Singapore: Government Printing Office, Singapore, 1936, Volume V, Chapter 258, pp. 724-747.

Nicolson, Sir Harold. *The Meaning of Prestige. The Rede Lecture delivered before the University of Cambridge on 23 April 1937*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937.

Nicolson, Sir Harold. *Monarchy*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Use and Abuse of History*. An English translation of *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben* (1873), translated by Adrian Collins, with an introduction by Julius Kraft. Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., Second Revised Edition, 1957.

Nisbet, Robert A. *Community and Power*. New York: Oxford University Press, a Galaxy Book, 1962. (Originally published in 1953 as *The Quest for Community: A Study in the Ethics of Order and Freedom*.)

Norman, Henry. *The Peoples and Politics of The Far East: Travels and Studies in the British, French, Spanish and Portuguese Colonies, Siberia, China, Japan, Korea, Siam and Malaya*. Sixth Impression. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1901.

Northcliffe, Alfred Viscount. *My Journey Round the World (16 July 1921 – 26 Feb. 1922)*. Edited by Cecil & St. St. John Harmsworth. London: John Lane The Bodley Head Ltd., 1923.

Nunn, Bernard. “Some Account of Our Governors and Civil Service.” In: Walter Makepeace, Gilbert E. Brooke, and Roland St. J. Braddell, editors. *One Hundred Years of Singapore*. London: John Murray, 1921. Republished with an Introduction by C.M. Turnbull: Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991, Volume One, pp. 69-148.

Oliphant, Laurence. *Narrative of The Earl of Elgin’s Mission to China and Japan in the Years 1857, ’58, ’59*. Volume I. Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1859. Reprinted, with an Introduction by J.J. Gerson, as: *Elgin’s Mission to China and Japan*. Volume I. London: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Onraet, René. *Singapore – A Police Background*. London: Dorothy Crisp and Co., Ltd., 1947.

Ooi Jin-Bee and Chiang Hai Ding, editors. *Modern Singapore*. Singapore: University of Singapore, 1969.

Osterhammel, Jürgen. *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*. Originally published in German as *Kolonialismus* in 1995 by Verlag C.H. Beck, Munich. Translated by Shelley



## Bibliography

L. Frisch. Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers; Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 1997.

*Our Place in Time: Exploring Heritage and Memory in Singapore.* Singapore: Singapore Heritage Society, 1999. (The title page of this book does not provide the names of its authors or editors.)

Owen, Roger, and Bob Sutcliffe, editors. *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism.* London: Longman Group Limited, 1972.

*Oxford English Dictionary Online.*

Pareto, Vilfredo. "The Treatise on General Sociology." In: Keith Grint, editor. *Leadership: Classical, Contemporary, and Critical Approaches.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 70-81.

Parkinson, C. Northcote. *British Intervention in Malaya 1867-1877.* Singapore: University of Malaya Press, 1960.

Parkinson, C. Northcote. *Inaugural Public Lecture Delivered by Dr. C. Northcote Parkinson, M.A., Ph.D., Raffles Professor of History in the University on 19th May, 1950 in the Oei Tiong Ham Hall, University of Malaya.* Singapore: University of Malaya, 1950.

Parkinson, C. Northcote. *Parkinson's Law or the Pursuit of Progress.* London: John Murray, 1958.

Parmer, J. Norman. *Colonial Labor Policy and Administration: A History of Labor in the Rubber Plantation Industry in Malaya, c. 1910-1941.* Locust Valley, New York: Published for the Association for Asian Studies by J.J. Augustin Incorporated Publisher, 1960.

Peet, George L. *Rickshaw Reporter.* Singapore: Eastern Universities Press Sdn. Bhd., 1985.

Peleggi, Maurizio. *Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002.

Pereira, Alexius. "It's Us Against Them: Sports in Singapore." In: Chan Kwok Bun and Tong Chee Kiong, editors. *Past Times: A Social History of Singapore.* Singapore: Times Editions, 2003, pp. 137-151.

Pfeiffer, Ida. *A Woman's Journey Round The World From Vienna To Brazil, Chili, Tahiti, China, Hindostan, Persia And Asia Minor.* Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, no year of publication listed. The author visited Singapore in 1846.

## Bibliography

Phillips, C.M. *A Text Book of the Malay Peninsula*. Singapore: Kelly & Walsh, Limited, 1904.

Porter, Andrew. "Empires in the Mind." In: P.J. Marshall, editor. *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 185-223.

"Portuguese Missions Ordinance." In: *The Laws of the Straits Settlements Edition of 1936. In Five Volumes*. Singapore: Government Printing Office, Singapore, 1936, Volume V, Chapter 251, pp. 676-685.

Pratt, Ambrose. *Magical Malaya*. Melbourne: Robertson & Mullens Ltd., 1931.

*Prewar Japanese Community in Singapore – Picture and Record*. Singapore: The Japanese Association, 1998.

Pringle, R.D. *A Brief Life of Sir Stamford Raffles: The Founder of Singapore*. Singapore: Methodist Publishing House, 1918. (This is the eighth document on microfilm reel NL 5829 in the Singapore National Library.)

Purcell, Victor. *The Memoirs of a Malayan Official*. London: Cassell & Company Ltd., 1965.

Puthucheary, J.J. *Ownership and Control in the Malayan Economy*. Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Co-operative Bookshop Ltd., 1979. Originally published in 1960 by Donald Moore for Eastern Universities Press Ltd., Singapore.

Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, and Singapore: Simon & Schuster, 2000.

Raffles, Sophia, Lady. *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, F.R.S. &c. Particularly in the Government of Java, 1811-1816, and of Bencoolen and Its Dependencies, 1817-1824; with Details of the Commerce and Resources of the Eastern Archipelago, and Selections from His Correspondence*. London: John Murray, 1830. Republished, with an Introduction by John Bastin. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Raffles, Sir Stamford. *Statement of the Services of Sir Stamford Raffles*. London: Cox and Baylis, 1824. Reprinted with an Introduction by John Bastin. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Rajah, Ananda. "Making and Managing Tradition in Singapore: The National Day Parade." In: *Our Place in Time: Exploring Heritage and Memory in Singapore*. Singapore: Singapore Heritage Society, 1999, pp. 96-110.

## Bibliography

Rajaratnam, S. *The Prophetic and the Political: Selected Speeches and Writings of S. Rajaratnam*, edited by Chan Heng Chee and Obaid ul Haq. Singapore: Graham Brash, and New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987.

Ramachandra, S. *Singapore Landmarks Past and Present*. With a Foreword by T.W. Ong, President, The Friends of Singapore. Singapore: Donald Moore for Eastern Universities Press Ltd., 1961.

Read, William Henry. *Play and Politics, Recollections of Malaya. By An Old Resident*. London: Wells Gardner, Darton & Co., 1901.

Reid, Anthony. "Merchant Imperialist: W. H. Read and the Dutch Consulate in the Straits Settlements." In: Brook Barrington, editor, *Empires, Imperialism and Southeast Asia: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Tarling*. Clayton, VIC, Australia: Monash Asia Institute, 1997, pp. 34-59.

Reid, Anthony, editor, with the assistance of Kristine Alilunas Rodgers. *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese: In Honour of Jennifer Cushman*. St. Leonards, New South Wales: Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd, 1996.

Reith, G.M. *Handbook to Singapore*. Second Edition, revised by Walter Makepeace. Singapore, Fraser and Neave, Limited, 1907. Originally published in 1892. Republished, with an Introduction by Paul Kratoska. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Rennie, J.S.M. *Musings of J.S.M.R. Mostly Malayan*. Singapore: Malaya Publishing House, Limited, 1933.

Reutens, Lulin. *The Eagle & the Lion: A History of the Singapore Island Country Club*. Singapore: Singapore Island Country Club, 1993.

Richards, Jeffrey. *Imperialism and Music: Britain 1876-1953*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2001.

Richardson, John G., editor. *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. New York, Westport (Connecticut), and London: Greenwood Press, 1986.

Robequain, Charles. *Malaya, Indonesia, Borneo, and the Philippines: A Geographical, Economic, and Political Description of Malaya, the East Indies, and the Philippines*. Translated by E.D. Laborde. London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1959. Originally published in French as *Le Monde Malais* by Editions Payot.

Robinson, Ronald. "Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration." In: Roger Owen and Bob Sutcliffe, editors. *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism*. London: Longman Group Limited, 1972, pp. 117-142.

## Bibliography

Robinson, Ronald, and John Gallagher, with Alice Denny. *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism*. London, Melbourne, and Toronto: Macmillan; New York: St Martin's Press: 1967.

Roff, William R. "Murder as an Aid to Social History: The Arabs in Singapore in the Early Twentieth Century." In: Huub de Jonge and Nico Kaptein, editors. *Transcending Borders: Arabs, Politics, Trade and Islam in Southeast Asia*. Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002, pp. 91-108.

Ross, John Dill. *The Capital of a Little Empire: A Descriptive Study of a British Crown Colony in the Far East*. Singapore, Hongkong, Shanghai and Yokohama: Kelly & Walsh, Ltd., 1898. National Library of Singapore Microfilm reel NL 5829.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*. Translated by Donald A. Cress. Introduction by James Miller. Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Social Contract or Principles of Political Right*. Translated by Henry J. Tozer. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1924. (First published in 1895.)

Rowe, William T. *Hankow: Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1796-1889*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984.

Rowe, William T. *Hankow: Conflict and Community in a Chinese City, 1796-1895*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989.

Sadka, Emily. *The Protected Malay States 1874-1895*. Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1968.

Sahlins, Marshall. *Stone Age Economics*. London: Tavistock Publications Limited, 1974.

Sandhu, K.S., and A. Mani, editors. *Indian Communities in Southeast Asia*. Singapore: Times Academic Press and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993.

Sandhu, Kernial Singh, and Paul Wheatley, editors. *Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989.

Santry, Denis, and Claude. *Salubrious Singapore*. Singapore: Kelly & Walsh, Ltd., 1920.

Savage, Victor R., and Brenda S.A. Yeoh. *Toponymics: A Study of Singapore Street Names*. First published in 2003. Second Edition: Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2004.

## Bibliography

Schachter, Stanley. "Cohesion, Social." In: David L. Sills, editor. *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. The Macmillan Company & The Free Press, 1968, Volume 2, pp. 542-546.

Schneiderman, Howard G. "Introduction." In: E. Digby Baltzell. *The Protestant Establishment Revisited*. Edited, and with an Introduction by, Howard G. Schneiderman. New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1991, pp. ix-xxxii.

Schweizer-Iten, Hans. *One Hundred Years of the Swiss Club and the Swiss Community of Singapore 1871-1971*. Singapore: The Swiss Club, 1981.

Scott, John H. MacCallum. *Eastern Journey*. London: The Travel Book Club, 1939.

Shafritz, Jay M., and Albert C. Hyde, editors. *Classics of Public Administration*. Third Edition. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1992.

Shahril Mohd Shah. "From the Mohammedan Advisory Board to the Muslim Advisory Board." In: Khoo Kay Kim, Elinah Abdullah, and Wan Meng Hao, editors. *Malays / Muslims in Singapore: Selected Readings in History, 1819-1965*. Singapore: Commissioned by the Association of Muslim Professionals, 2006, pp. 159-181.

Sharp, Ilsa. *The Singapore Cricket Club 1852-1985*. Singapore: The Singapore Cricket Club, Singapore, 1985.

Sharp, Ilsa. *There is Only One Raffles: The Story of a Grand Hotel*. London: Souvenir Press, 1981, reprinted 1982.

Shils, Edward. "Deference." In: Edward Shils. *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1975, pp. 276-303.

Shils, Edward. *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1975.

Shils, Edward. "Center and Periphery." In: Edward Shils. *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1975, pp. 3-16. (Reprinted from: *The Logic of Personal Knowledge: Essays in Honour of Michael Polanyi*.)

Shils, Edward. "The Integration of Society." In: Edward Shils. *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1975, pp. 48-90.

Shils, Edward. "Society and Societies: The Macrosociological View." In: Edward Shils. *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1975, pp. 34-47.

## Bibliography

Shils, Edward. "The Stratification System of Mass Society." In: Edward Shils. *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1975, pp. 304-314.

Shils, Edward. "Tradition." In: Edward Shils. *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1975, pp. 182-218.

Shils, Edward, and Michael Young. "The Meaning of the Coronation." In: Edward Shils. *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1975, pp. 135-152. (Reprinted from: *The Sociological Review*, Volume 1, Number 2 (December 1953), pp. 63-81.)

Shinozaki, Mamoru. *Syonan – My Story: The Japanese Occupation of Singapore*. Singapore: Asia Pacific Press, 1975.

Siddique, Sharon. *Nutmeg, and a Touch of Spice: The Story of Cairnhill Road*. Singapore: Sembawang Properties, 2000.

Siddique, Sharon, and Nirmala Puru Shotam. *Singapore's Little India: Past, Present, and Future*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982.

Sidney, R.J.H. *Malay Land "Tanah Malayu" Some Phases of Life in Modern British Malaya*. London: Cecil Palmer, 1926.

Sills, David L., editor. *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. The Macmillan Company & The Free Press, 1968.

Silverman, David. *The Theory of Organisations: A Sociological Framework*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1970.

Sim, Victor, editor. *Biographies of Prominent Chinese in Singapore*. Singapore: Nan Kok Publication Company, 1950.

Simmel, Georg. *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. Translated, edited, and with an introduction by Kurt H. Wolff. Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1950.

*Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce Sixtieth Anniversary Memento*. (There is no publication information or author's name provided in the copy of this booklet in the collection of the Hon Sui Sen Memorial Library at the National University of Singapore.)

*Singapore Phone Book Business Listings 2005 / 2006*. Singapore: Yellow Pages (Singapore) Limited, 2005.

## Bibliography

Sinn, Elizabeth. *Power and Charity: A Chinese Merchant Elite in Colonial Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003. Originally published in 1989 as: *Power and Charity: The Early History of the Tung Wah Hospital, Hong Kong*.

Sinnadurai, Dato' Visu, editor. *The Privy Council Cases: Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei: 1875-1990*. Volume One. Kuala Lumpur: Professional Law Books; London: Sweet & Maxwell Ltd, 1990.

Skinner, G. William. "Creolized Chinese Societies in Southeast Asia." In: Anthony Reid, editor, with the assistance of Kristine Alilunas Rodgers. *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese: In Honour of Jennifer Cushman*. St. Leonards, New South Wales: Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd, 1996, pp. 51-93.

Slemrod, Joel B., editor. *Does Atlas Shrug? The Economic Consequences of Taxing the Rich*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press.

Smith, Carl T. *Chinese Christians: Élites, Middlemen, and the Church in Hong Kong*. With a Foreword by James Hayes. Hong Kong, Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

So, Alvin Y., Nan Lin, and Dudley Poston, editors. *The Chinese Triangle of Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong: Comparative Institutional Analyses*. Westport, Connecticut, and London: Greenwood Press, 2001.

Solomon, Eli. *Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles: A Comprehensive Bibliography*. With an Introduction by Associate Professor Ernest Chew. Edited by Alice Loh. Singapore: National Library Board, 1997.

Song Ong Siang (Sir Ong Siang Song). *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*. London: John Murray, 1923. Republished with an Introduction by Edwin Lee: Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984.

Spencer, Herbert. *The Principles of Sociology*. Volume II. London and Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1893.

Stearns, Peter N. *Expanding the Past: A Reader in Social History*. New York and London: New York University Press, 1988.

Stearns, Peter N. "Introduction: Social History and Its Evolution." In: Peter N. Stearns, *Expanding the Past: A Reader in Social History*. New York and London: New York University Press, 1988, pp. 3-16.

Stevens, H.W.H. *Reminiscences of a Hard Case*. Singapore: Lithographers Limited, 1937.

## Bibliography

Sunait Chutintaranond and Chris Baker, editors. *Recalling Local Pasts: Autonomous History in Southeast Asia*. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2002.

Suryadinata, Leo, ed. *Ethnic Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia: A Dialogue between Tradition and Modernity*. Singapore: Times Academic Press, 2002.

Suryadinata, Leo. "Peranakan Chinese Identities in Singapore and Malaysia: A Re-Examination." In: Suryadinata, Leo, ed. *Ethnic Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia: A Dialogue between Tradition and Modernity*. Singapore: Times Academic Press, 2002, pp. 69-84.

Swartz, David. *Culture & Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Swettenham, Sir Frank. *British Malaya: An Account of the Origin and Progress of British Influence in Malaya*. London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., First published in 1906; Seventh Impression 1955.

Swidler, Ann. "Geertz's Ambiguous Legacy." In: Dan Clawson, ed. *Required Reading: Sociology's Most Influential Books*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998, pp. 79-84.

Tan, Kevin Y.L. "A Short Legal and Constitutional History of Singapore." In: Kevin Y.L. Tan, editor. *Essays in Singapore Legal History*. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic and the Singapore Academy of Law, 2005, pp. 27-72.

Tan, Kevin Y.L., editor. *Essays in Singapore Legal History*. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic and the Singapore Academy of Law, 2005.

Tan, Sumiko. *The Winning Connection: 150 Years of Racing in Singapore*. Singapore: Bukit Turf Club, 1992.

Tan Tai Yong. *Singapore Khalsa Association*. Singapore: Times Books International, 1988.

"Tan Tock Seng's Hospital Ordinance." In: *The Laws of the Straits Settlements Edition of 1936. In Five Volumes*. Singapore: Government Printing Office, Singapore, 1936, Volume V, Chapter 192, pp. 145-149.

*Tanjong Pagar: Singapore's Cradle of Development*. Singapore: Tanjong Pagar Citizens' Consultative Committee, 1989.

Tarling, Nicholas, editor. *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia: Volume Two: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.



## Bibliography

Tate, D.J.M. *Straits Affairs The Malay World and Singapore: Being Glimpses of the Straits Settlements and the Malay Peninsula in the Nineteenth Century As Seen Through The Illustrated London News and Other Contemporary Sources*. Hong Kong: John Nicholson Ltd., 1989.

Thio, Eunice. *British Policy in The Malay Peninsula 1880-1910. Volume I The Southern and Central States*. Singapore: University of Malaya Press, 1969.

Thomson, John. *The Straits of Malacca Indo-China and China or Ten Years' Travels, Adventures and Residence Abroad*. London: Sampson Low, Marston, Low, & Searle, 1875. The first six chapters of this book were reprinted as: *The Straits of Malacca, Siam and Indo-China: Travels and Adventures of a Nineteenth-century Photographer*. With an Introduction by Judith Balmer. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Thomson, John Turnbull. *Some Glimpses into Life in the Far East*. London: Richardson & Company, 1864. Reprinted under the title *Glimpses into Life in Malayan Lands*. With an Introduction and Annotations by John Hall-Jones. Singapore: Oxford University Press, Second Impression, 1991.

Tim Yap Fuan, editor. *A Sense Of History: A Select Bibliography on the History of Singapore*. Singapore: The National University of Singapore Library, 1998.

Tong Chee Kiong and Lian Kwen Fee, editors. *The Making of Singapore Sociology: Society and State*. Singapore: Times Academic Press in association with Brill Academic Publishers, 2002.

Tregonning, K.G. *The British in Malaya: The First Forty Years 1786-1826*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1965.

Tregonning, K.G. "The Historical Background." In: Ooi Jin-Bee and Chiang Hai Ding, editors. *Modern Singapore*. Singapore: University of Singapore, 1969, pp. 14-19.

Tregonning, K.G. *A History of Modern Malaya*. London: Eastern Universities Press Ltd., 1964.

Tregonning, K.G. *Home Port Singapore: A History of Straits Steamship Company Limited 1890-1965*. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1967.

Tregonning, K.G. *Home Port Singapore: An Australian Historian's Experience 1953-1967*. Nathan, Australia: Griffith University, 1989.

Tregonning, K.G. *The Singapore Cold Storage 1903-1966*. Singapore: Cold Storage Holdings Ltd., 1966.

Tregonning, K.G. *Straits Tin: A Brief Account of the First Seventy-Five Years of The Straits Trading Company, Limited. 1887-1962*. Singapore: Straits Times Press, 1962.

## Bibliography

Trocki, Carl A. *Opium and Empire: Chinese Society in Colonial Singapore, 1800-1910*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990.

Trocki, Carl A. "Political Structures in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries." In: Nicholas Tarling, editor. *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia: Volume Two: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 79-130.

Trocki, Carl A. *Prince of Pirates: The Temenggongs and the Development of Johor and Singapore 1784-1885*. Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1979.

Trocki, Carl A. *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control*. London and New York: Routledge, 2006.

Trocki, Carl A. "Tan Seng Poh." In: John Butcher and Howard Dick, editors. *The Rise and Fall of Revenue Farming: Business Elites and the Emergence of the Modern State in Southeast Asia*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993, pp. 249-254.

Turnbull, C.M. *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*. Second Edition. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1989, fourth impression 1997.

Turnbull, C.M. *Dateline Singapore: 150 Years of The Straits Times*. Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings, 1995.

Turnbull, C.M. *The Straits Settlements 1826-67: Indian Presidency to Crown Colony*. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1972.

Turner, Bryan S. *Status*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1988.

Vaughan, J.D. *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese of the Straits Settlements*. With an Introduction by Wilfred Blythe. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1985. Originally published in Singapore by the Mission Press in 1879.

Veblen, Thorstein. *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1949. Originally published in 1899.

Vetch, Colonel R.H., editor. *Life of Lieut.-General the Hon. Sir Andrew Clarke, G.C.M.G., C.B., C.I.E.* With a Preface by Colonel Sir G.S. Clarke. London: John Murray, 1905.

Vlieland, C.A. *British Malaya (The Colony of the Straits Settlements and the Malay States under British Protection, Namely the Federated States of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang and the States of Johore, Kedah, Kelantan, Trengganu, Perlis and Brunei)*. A Report on the 1931 Census and on Certain Problems of Vital Statistics. London: The Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1932.

## Bibliography

Wallace, Alfred Russel. *The Malay Archipelago: The Land of the Orang-Utan, and the Bird of Paradise. A Narrative of Travel, with Studies of Man and Nature.* New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1869. Reprinted, with an Introduction by John Bastin: Singapore, Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Wallerstein, Immanuel, editor. *Social Change: The Colonial Situation.* New York, London, and Sydney: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1966.

Walsh, Barbara Ann, with research by Jan and Graham Bell. *Forty Good Men: The Story of the Tanglin Club In The Island of Singapore 1865-1990.* Singapore: The Tanglin Club, 1991.

Wan Meng Hao. "Malay Soldiering in Singapore, 1910-1942." In: Khoo Kay Kim, Elinah Abdullah, and Wan Meng Hao, editors. *Malays / Muslims in Singapore: Selected Readings in History, 1819-1965.* Singapore: Commissioned by the Association of Muslim Professionals, 2006, pp. 183-219.

Wang Gungwu. "A Short History of the Nanyang Chinese." In: Wang Gungwu. *Community and Nation: China, Southeast Asia and Australia.* St Leonards, New South Wales: Asian Studies Association of Australia in association with Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd, new edition, 1992, pp. 11-39.

Wang Gungwu. *China and the Chinese Overseas.* Singapore: Times Academic Press, first published in 1991, reprinted in 2000.

Wang Gungwu. "The Chinese as Immigrants and Settlers: Singapore." In: Wang Gungwu. *China and the Chinese Overseas.* Singapore: Times Academic Press, first published in 1991, reprinted in 2000, pp. 166-178.

Wang Gungwu. *Community and Nation: China, Southeast Asia and Australia.* St Leonards, New South Wales: Asian Studies Association of Australia in association with Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd, new edition, 1992.

Wang Gungwu. "The Culture of Chinese Merchants." In: Wang Gungwu. *China and the Chinese Overseas.* Singapore: Times Academic Press, first published in 1991, reprinted in 2000, pp. 181-197.

Wang Gungwu. "Early Ming Relations with Southeast Asia: A Background Essay." In: Wang Gungwu. *Community and Nation: China, Southeast Asia and Australia.* St Leonards, New South Wales: Asian Studies Association of Australia in association with Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd, new edition, 1992, pp. 77-107.

Wang Gungwu. "Lu Xun, Lim Boon Keng and Confucianism." In: Wang Gungwu. *China and the Chinese Overseas.* Singapore: Times Academic Press, first published in 1991, reprinted in 2000, pp. 147-165.

## Bibliography

Wang Gungwu. "Merchants without Empires: the Hokkien Sojourning Communities." In: Wang Gungwu. *China and the Chinese Overseas*. Singapore: Times Academic Press, first published in 1991, reprinted in 2000, pp. 79-101.

Warner, W. Lloyd. *The Family of God: A Symbolic Study of Christian Life in America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961.

Warner, W. Lloyd, with Marchia Meeker and Kenneth Eells, *Social Class in America: A Manual of Procedure for the Measurement of Social Status*. New York: Harper Torchbooks, Harper & Row, Publishers, 1960.

Warren, James Francis. *Ah Ku and Karayuki-san: Prostitution in Singapore 1870-1940*. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Warren, James Francis. *Rickshaw Coolie: A People's History of Singapore (1880-1940)*. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Waterson, Roxana. "Gathering Speed: Transport and the Pace of Life." In: Chan Kwok Bun and Tong Chee Kiong, editors. *Past Times: A Social History of Singapore*. Singapore: Times Editions, 2003, pp. 103-121.

Weber, Max. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Translated, edited, and with an introduction by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. New York: Oxford University Press, 1958.

Webster, Anthony. *Gentlemen Capitalists: British Imperialism in South East Asia 1770-1890*. London and New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 1998.

Wee, Peter H.L. *From Farm and Kampong*. Singapore: Graham Brash, 1989.

Wee Tong Bao. "Chinese Education in Prewar Singapore: A Preliminary Analysis of Factors Affecting the Development of Chinese Vernacular Schools." In: Michael W. Charney, Brenda S.A. Yeoh, and Tong Chee Kiong, editors. *Chinese Migrants Abroad: Cultural, Educational, and Social Dimensions of the Chinese Diaspora*. Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2003, pp. 101-113.

"Weights and Measures Ordinance." In: *The Laws of the Straits Settlements Edition of 1936. In Five Volumes*. Singapore: Government Printing Office, Singapore, 1936, Volume V, Chapter 204, pp. 216-223.

Weininger, Elliot B. "Foundations of Pierre Bourdieu's Class Analysis." In: Erik Olin Wright, ed. *Approaches to Class Analysis*. Forthcoming publication from Cambridge University Press. The text of this book was available on Erik Olin Wright's Home Page at <http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright/>.

## Bibliography

Weld, Sir Frederick A. "The Straits Settlements and British Malaya." A paper presented to the Royal Colonial Institute on 10 June 1884. In: Paul H. Kratoska, editor. *Honourable Intentions: Talks on the British Empire in South-East Asia delivered at the Royal Colonial Institute 1874-1928*. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1983, pp. 43-74.

*Who's Who in Malaya 1918*. Compiled by J.W. Dossett. Singapore: Dossett & Co., 1918. Singapore National Library microfilm reel NL 5829.

*Who's Who in Malaya 1925*. Edited by Julius S. Fisher. Singapore: Julius S. Fisher, 1925. Singapore National Library microfilm reel NL 6705.

*Who's Who in Malaya 1939*. Edited by Julius S. Fisher. Singapore: Fishers Limited, 1939.

Wilentz, Sean, editor. *Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual, and Politics Since the Middle Ages*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985.

Wilkes, Charles. *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition, during the Years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842*, Ingram, Cooke, and Co., London, 1852, quoted in: John Bastin, *Travellers' Singapore: An Anthology* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 46-53.

Wilson, Margaret C. *Malaya: The Land of Enchantment*. Amersham: R. Norrie The Mascot Press, 1937?

Winsley, T.M., Captain. *A History of the Singapore Volunteer Corps 1854-1937 being also An Historical Outline of Volunteering in Malaya*. Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1938.

Winstedt, Sir Richard. *A History of Johore (1365-1895)*. Kuala Lumpur: The Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1979. Previously published in the *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume 10, Part 3, December 1932.

Winstedt, R.O. (Sir Richard Winstedt). *Malaya: The Straits Settlements and the Federated and Unfederated Malay States*. London, Bombay, and Sydney: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1923.

Wise, Michael, with Mun Him Wise. *Travellers' Tales of Old Singapore*. Singapore: Times Books International, 1985.

Wong Lin Ken. "Commercial Growth before the Second World War." In: Ernest C.T. Chew and Edwin Lee, editors. *A History of Singapore*. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991, third impression 1997, pp. 41-65.

## Bibliography

Wong Lin Ken. "Western Enterprise and the Development of the Malayan Tin Industry to 1914." In: C. D. Cowan, ed. *The Economic Development of South-East Asia: Studies in Economic History and Political Economy*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1964, pp. 127-153.

Wood, Glenn A., editor. *American Association of Singapore 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*. Singapore: American Association of Singapore, 1967.

Wright, Arnold, and H.A. Cartwright, editors. *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya*. London: Lloyd's Greater Britain Publishing Company, Ltd., 1908. NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0028717.

Wright, Arnold, and Thomas H. Reid. *The Malay Peninsula: A Record of British Progress in the Middle East*. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1912.

Wright, Erik Olin, editor. *Approaches to Class Analysis*. Forthcoming publication from Cambridge University Press. The text of this book was available on Erik Olin Wright's Home Page at <http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright/>.

Wright, Erik Olin. *Class Counts: Comparative Studies in Class Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Wright, Nadia H. *Respected Citizens: The History of Armenians in Singapore and Malaysia*. Victoria, Australia: Amassia Pub., 2003.

Wrong, Dennis H. *The Problem of Order: What Unites and Divides Society*. New York: The Free Press, 1994.

Wu Chun-hsi. *Dollars Dependents and Dogma: Overseas Chinese Remittances to Communist China*. With an introduction by C.F. Remer. Stanford: The Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, 1967.

Wu Xiao An. *Chinese Business in the Making of a Malay State, 1882-1941: Kedah and Penang*. London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003.

Wurtzburg, C.E. *Raffles of the Eastern Isles*. Edited for publication by Clifford Witting. First published by Hodder & Stoughton in 1954. First issued in Oxford in Asia Paperbacks in 1984. Reissued as an Oxford University Press paperback in 1986. Second Impression 1990. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Yap Pheng Geck. *Scholar, Banker, Gentleman Soldier: The Reminiscences of Dr. Yap Pheng Geck*. Singapore: Times Books International, 1982.

Yap, Richard, editor-in-chief. *Singapore Chinese Swimming Club: 88 Years and Beyond*. With a Foreword by Dr. Wee Kim Wee. Singapore: Singapore Chinese Swimming Club, 1998.

## Bibliography

Yen Ching-hwang. "Hokkien Immigrant Society and Modern Chinese Education in British Malaya, 1904-1941." In: Michael W. Charney, Brenda S.A. Yeoh, and Tong Chee Kiong, editors. *Chinese Migrants Abroad: Cultural, Educational, and Social Dimensions of the Chinese Diaspora*. Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2003, pp. 114-144.

Yen Ching-hwang. *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Yen Ching-hwang. "Traditional Ethnic Chinese Business Organizations in Singapore and Malaysia." In: Leo Suryadinata, ed., *Ethnic Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia: A Dialogue between Tradition and Modernity*. Singapore: Times Academic Press, 2002, pp. 195-217.

Yeo Kim Wah. *Political Development in Singapore 1945-55*. Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1973.

Yeo Tiam Siew. *Destined to Survive: The Story of My Life*. Singapore: Published by Yeo Tiam Siew, 1993.

Yeoh, Brenda S.A. *Contesting Space: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment in Colonial Singapore*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Yong, C.F. (Yong Ching-fatt). *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*. Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1992.

Yong, C.F. (Yong Ching-fatt). *Tan Kah-kee: The Making of an Overseas Chinese Legend*. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Yong Mun Cheong, editor. *Asian Traditions and Modernization: Perspectives from Singapore*. Singapore: Times Academic Press for the Centre for Advanced Studies, National University of Singapore, 1992.

Yong Mun Cheong. "Some Thoughts on Modernization and Race Relations in the Political History of Singapore." In: Yong Mun Cheong, editor. *Asian Traditions and Modernization: Perspectives from Singapore*. Singapore: Times Academic Press for the Centre for Advanced Studies, National University of Singapore, 1992, pp. 56-77.

Young, John Russell. *Around the World with General Grant: A Narrative of the Visit of General U.S. Grant, Ex-President of the United States, to Various Countries in Europe, Asia, and Africa, in 1877, 1878, 1879. To Which Are Added Certain Conversations with General Grant on Questions Connected with American Politics and History*. Volume II. New York: The American News Company, 1879.

## Bibliography

Zollschan, George K., and Walter Hirsch, editors. *Explorations in Social Change*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964.

Zorbaugh, Harvey Warren. *The Gold Coast and the Slum: A Sociological Study of Chicago's Near North Side*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1929; Ninth Impression, 1957.

### Academic Journal Articles

Allen, J. de Vere. "Malayan Civil Service, 1874-1941: Colonial Bureaucracy / Malayan Elite." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Volume 12, Issue 2, (April 1970), pp. 149-178.

Benoit-Smullyan, Emile. "Status, Status Types, and Status Interrelations." *American Sociological Review*, Volume 9, Number 2 (April 1944), pp. 151-161.

Berger, John. "The Nature of Mass Demonstrations." *New Society*, No. 295 (23 May 1968), pp. 754-755.

Betts, Raymond. "The Allusion to Rome in British Imperialist Thought of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries." *Victorian Studies*, Volume XV, Number 2 (December 1971), pp. 149-159.

Bourdieu, Pierre. "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups." *Theory and Society*, Vol. 14, No. 6 (November 1985), pp. 723-744.

Bourdieu, Pierre. "Social Space and Symbolic Power." *Sociological Theory*, Volume 7, Number 1 (Spring 1989), pp. 14-25. (Reprinted in: Donald McQuarie, editor, with contributions by R. Serge Denisoff. *Readings in Contemporary Sociological Theory: From Modernity to Post-Modernity*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1995, pp. 323-334; and: Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, pp. 123-139.)

Bourdieu, Pierre. "What Makes a Social Class? On The Theoretical and Practical Existence Of Groups." *Berkeley Journal of Sociology: A Critical Review*, Volume XXXII, 1987, pp. 1-17.

Bowden, Ross. "*Tapu and Mana: Ritual Authority and Political Power in Traditional Maori Society.*" *The Journal of Pacific History*, Volume XIV, Part I, 1979, pp. 50-61.

Bushee, Frederick A. "Social Organizations in a Small City." *The American Journal of Sociology*, Volume 51, Number 3 (November 1945), pp. 217-226.



## *Bibliography*

Buttimer, Anne. "Social Space in Interdisciplinary Perspective." *Geographical Review*, Vol. 59, No. 3 (July 1969), pp. 417-426.

Chen Zen, Sophia. "China's Changing Culture." *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 4, No. 12, (December 1931), pp. 1070-1081.

Choy Chee Meh. "History of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society." *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*. Volume 68, Part 2 (December 1995), pp. 81-148.

Chua Beng Huat. "The Changing Shape of Civil Society in Singapore." *Commentary, Journal of The National University of Singapore Society*, Volume 11, Number 1 (1993), pp. 9-14.

Clawson, Mary Ann. "Fraternal Orders and Class Formation in the Nineteenth-Century United States." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (October 1985), pp. 672-695.

Cooper, Frederick. "Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History," *The American Historical Review*, Volume 99, Number 5 (December 1994), pp. 1516-1545.

Cowan, C.D., editor. "Early Penang & the Rise of Singapore 1805-1832: Documents from the manuscript records of the East India Company, selected & edited with an introduction by C.D. Cowan, M.A., Lecturer in History at the University of Malaya." *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*. Volume XXIII, Part 2, (March 1950), pp. 1-210.

Davis, Kingsley. "A Conceptual Analysis of Stratification." *American Sociological Review*, Volume 7, Number 3 (June 1942), pp. 309-321.

Douglas, Bronwen. "Conflict and Alliance in a Colonial Context: Case Studies in New Caledonia 1853-1870." *The Journal of Pacific History*, Volume XV, Part 1, January 1980, pp. 21-51.

Ee, Joyce. "Chinese Migration to Singapore, 1896-1941." *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (March 1961), pp. 33-50.

Fairbank, J.K., and S.Y. Têng. "On the Ch'ing Tributary System." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* Vol. 6, No. 2 (June 1941), pp. 135-246.

Fairbank, J.K. "Tributary Trade and China's Relations with the West." *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (February 1942), pp. 129-149.

Festinger, Leon. "A Theory of Social Comparison Processes." *Human Relations*, Volume VII, No. 2 (May 1954), pp. 117-140.

## Bibliography

Gibson-Hill, C.A. "Raffles, Aceh and the Order of the Golden Sword." *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume 29, Part 1 (May 1956), pp. 1-19.

Gibson-Hill, C.A. Review of C.B. Buckley's *Anecdotal History*. *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume 27, Part 1 (1954), pp. 235-243.

Goffman, Erving. "Symbols of Class Status." *The British Journal of Sociology*, Volume 2, Number 4 (December 1951), pp. 294-304.

Goodman, Bryna. "Improvisations on a Semicolonial Theme, or, How to Read a Celebration of Transnational Urban Community." *Journal of Asian Studies*, Volume 59, Number 4 (November 2000), pp. 889-926.

Goss, Jon. Review of *Contesting Space* by Brenda S.A. Yeoh. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 89, No. 1 (Mar. 1999), pp. 187-189.

Gouldner, Alvin W. "The Norm of Reciprocity: A Preliminary Statement." *American Sociological Review*, Volume 25, Number 2 (April 1960), pp. 161-178.

Granovetter, Mark S. "The Strength of Weak Ties." *The American Journal of Sociology*. Vol. 78, No. 6 (May 1973), pp. 1360-1380.

Granovetter, Mark S. "The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited." *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 1 (1983), pp. 201-233.

Greenblatt Stephen J. Review of Roy Strong's book, *The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry*, in: *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Winter 1978), pp. 642-644.

Guillebaud, Philomena. "The Role of Honorary Awards in the Soviet Economic System." *American Slavic and East European Review*, Volume 12, Number 4 (December 1953), pp. 486-505.

Hanifan, L.J. "The Rural School Community Center." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 67, New Possibilities in Education (September 1916), pp. 130-138.

Harper, T.N. "'Asian Values' and Southeast Asian Histories." *The Historical Journal*, Volume 40, Number 2 (June 1997), pp. 507-517.

Harrison, Simon. "Four Types of Symbolic Conflict." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (June 1995), pp. 255-272.

Harrison, Simon. "Ritual as Intellectual Property." *Man*, New Series, Vol. 27, No. 2 (June 1992), pp. 225-244.

## Bibliography

Hexter, J.H. "A New Framework for Social History." *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (December 1955), pp. 415-426.

Hodder, B.W. "Racial Groupings in Singapore." *The Malayan Journal of Tropical Geography*, Volume One (October 1953), pp. 25-36.

Hough, G.G. "Notes on the Educational Policy of Sir Stamford Raffles." *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume XI, Part II (December 1933), pp. 166-170.

Horvath, Ronald J. "In Search of a Theory of Urbanization: Notes on the Colonial City." *The East Lakes Geographer*, Volume 5 (December 1969), pp. 69-82.

Hsü, Immanuel C.Y. "The Secret Mission of the *Lord Amherst* on the China Coast, 1832." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1/2 (June 1954), pp. 231-252.

Hu, Hsien Chin. "The Chinese Concepts of 'Face'." *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Volume 46, Number 1, Part 1 (January-March 1944), pp. 45-64.

Huberman, Bernardo A., Christoph H. Loch, and Ayse Öncüler. "Status As a Valued Resource." *Social Psychology Quarterly*, Volume 67, Number 1 (March 2004), pp. 103-114.

Huff, W.G. "The Development of the Rubber Market in Pre-World War II Singapore." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Volume 24, Number 2 (September 1993), pp. 285-306.

Hwang, Kwang-kuo. "Face and Favor: The Chinese Power Game." *The American Journal of Sociology*, Volume 92, Number 4 (January 1987), pp. 944-974.

Jameson, Samuel Haig. "Principles of Social Interaction." *American Sociological Review*, Volume 10, Number 1 (February 1945), pp. 6-12.

Kennedy, Dane. "Imperial History and Post-Colonial Theory." *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 24, No. 3, September 1996, pp. 345-363.

Lee Kam Hing and Ahmat Adam. "Raffles' Order of the Golden Sword Reviewed." *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume 63, Part 2 (December 1990), pp. 77-89.

Lee, Y.K. "The Grand Jury in Early Singapore (1819-1873)." *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume XLVI, Pt. 2 (1973), pp. 55-150.

Leong Foke Meng. "Early Land Transactions in Singapore: The Real Estates of William Farquhar (1774-1839), John Crawfurd (1783-1868), and Their Families." *Journal of the*

## Bibliography

*Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume LXXVII, Part 1 (June 2004), pp. 23-42.

Lian Kwen Fee and Koh Keng We. "Chinese Enterprise in Colonial Malaya: The Case of Eu Tong Sen." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 35 (3) (October 2004), pp. 415-432.

Loh Wei Leng. "The Colonial State And Business: The Policy Environment in Malaya in the Inter-War Years." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 33 (2) (June 2002), pp. 243-256.

Long, Norton E. "The Local Community as an Ecology of Games." *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (November 1958), pp. 251-261.

Marriott, (Sir) Hayes. "Population of the Straits Settlements and Malay Peninsula during the last Century." *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, No. 62 (December 1912), p. 31 and the following tables.

McKenna, R.B. "Sir Laurence Guillemard and Political Control of the Chinese in Singapore, 1920-1927." *Journal of the South Seas Society*, Volume 49 (1994), pp. 10-33.

Milner, A.C. "Colonial Records History: British Malaya." *Kajian Malaysia: Journal of Malaysian Studies*, Volume IV, No. 2 (December 1986), pp. 1-18.

Morris, H.S. "Some Aspects of the Concept Plural Society." *Man*, New Series, Vol. 2, No. 2 (June 1967), pp. 169-184.

"Obituary: Tan Sri Dr. Lee Kong Chian." *Journal of Southeast Asian Researches*, Volume 3 (December 1967), pp. 2-5.

Parkinson, C.N. "A Review of Charles Wurtzburg's 'Raffles of the Eastern Isles'." *The Malayan Historical Journal*, Volume 2, Number 1 (July 1955), pp. 59-71.

Pearson, Captain H.F. "Short Notes: Lt. Jackson's Plan of Singapore." *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume 26, Part I (July 1953), pp. 200-204.

Pearson, Captain H.F. "Singapore from the Sea, June 1823. Notes on a Recently Discovered Sketch attributed to Lt. Phillip Jackson." *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume 26, Part I (July 1953), pp. 43-55.

Png Poh Seng. "The Kuomintang in Malaya, 1912-1941." *Journal of Southeast Asian History*. Volume 2, Number 1 (March 1961), pp. 1-32.

## Bibliography

Png Poh-seng. "The Straits Chinese in Singapore: A Case of Local Identity and Socio-Cultural Accommodation." *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Volume X, Number 1 (March 1969), pp. 95-114.

Portes, Alejandro. "Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology." *Annual Review of Sociology*, Volume 24 (1998), pp. 1-24.

Ray, Rajat Kanta. "Asian Capital in the Age of European Domination: The Rise of the Bazaar, 1800-1914." *Modern Asian Studies*, Volume 29, Number 3 (July 1995), pp. 449-554.

Rowbottom, Anne. "'The Real Royalists': Folk Performance and Civil Religion at Royal Visits." *Folklore*, Volume 109 (1998), pp. 77-88.

Schwartz, Barry. "The Social Context of Commemoration: A Study in Collective Memory." *Social Forces*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (December 1982), pp. 374-402.

Screenivasan, B.R. "The Late Dato Lee Kong Chian – An Appreciation," *Journal of the South Seas Society*, Volume XXII, Parts 1 & 2, 1967, published in 1969, pp. 19-20.

Shils, Edward, and Michael Young. "The Meaning of the Coronation." *The Sociological Review*, Volume 1, Number 2 (December 1953), pp. 63-81. (Reprinted in: Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*, pp. 135-152.)

Skocpol, Theda. "Social History and Historical Sociology: Contrasts and Complementarities." *Social Science History*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Spring 1987), pp. 17-30.

Smail, John R.W. "On the Possibility of an Autonomous History of Modern Southeast Asia." *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Volume 2, No. 2 (July 1961), pp. 72-102.

Sorokin, Pitirim A. "Arnold J. Toynbee's Philosophy of History." *The Journal of Modern History*, Volume 12, Number 3 (September 1940), pp. 374-387.

Speier, Hans. "Honor and Social Structure." *Social Research: An International Quarterly of Political and Social Science*. Volume Two, Number One, February 1935, pp. 74-97.

Stark, David. "Class Struggle and the Transformation of the Labor Process: A Relational Approach." *Theory and Society*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (January 1980), pp. 89-130.

Stoler, Ann Laura. "Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Volume 31, Number 1 (January 1989), pp. 134-161.

## *Bibliography*

Tan Ee Leong. "The Chinese Banks Incorporated in Singapore & the Federation of Malaya." *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 26, Pt. 1, 1953, pp. 113-139.

Teng Ssu-yu. "Chinese Influence on the Western Examination System." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (September 1943), pp. 267-312.

Thio, Eunice. "The Extension of British Control to Pahang." *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 30, Part 1 (May 1957), pp. 46-74.

Tregonning, K.G. "Tan Cheng Lock: A Malayan Nationalist." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Volume X, Number 1 (March 1979), pp. 25-76.

Wake, C.H. "Raffles and the Rajas: The Founding of Singapore in Malayan and British Colonial History." *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 48, Part 1 (May 1975), pp. 47-73.

Williams, Lea E. "Chinese Leadership in Early British Singapore." *Asian Studies*, Volume II, Number 2 (August 1964), pp. 170-179.

Wong Lin Ken. "Singapore: Its Growth as an Entrepot Port, 1819-1941." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*. Volume IX, Number 1 (March 1978), pp. 50-84.

Wong Lin Ken. "The Trade of Singapore, 1819-69." *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume 33, Part 4, Number 192 (December 1960), pp. 1-315.

Wurtzburg, C.E. "The Birthday of Sir Stamford Raffles." *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume 20, Part 1 (June 1947), p. 187.

Yen Ching-hwang. "Ch'ing's Sale of Honours and the Chinese Leadership in Singapore and Malaya (1877-1912)." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Volume 1, Number 2 (September 1970), pp. 20-32.

## Bibliography

### Magazine Articles

"As You Were." "Gone are the Days." *British Malaya*, September 1949, pp. 305-308.

Bastin, John. "Raffles in Marble & Bronze," *The Straits Times Annual for 1972*, pp. 58-63.

Bastin, John. "Raffles the Naturalist," *The Straits Times Annual for 1971*, pp. 58-63.

Clifford, Sir Hugh. "A Lesson from the Malay States." *The Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 84, No. 505 (November 1899), pp. 587-599. A bound copy of this article is in the Singapore-Malaysia Collection of the NUS Central Library, call number DS 596.3 Cli.

Harries, J.W. "The Singapore Municipal Commission: Some Details of the History of Singapore's Municipal System." *British Malaya*, August 1929, pp. 113-115.

Laverton, R.H.C. "Malaya Becomes Sport-Minded: The Asiatic Sweeps the Board." 1936 *Straits Times Annual*, pp. 104 and 107. Singapore National Library Lee Kong Chian Reference Library microfilm reel NL 7746.

Leslie, Andrew. "Brink of a Cultural Flowering." *The Straits Times Annual '82*, 1982, pp. 20-35.

Maxwell, Sir George. "The Mixed Communities of Malaya." *British Malaya*, February 1943, pp. 115-119 and 121.

Onraet, Rene. "The Old Police Force and The New." *British Malaya*, November 1940, pp. 111-112.

Song, Sir Ong Siang. "The King's Chinese: Their Cultural Evolution From Immigrants to Citizens of a Crown Colony." 1936 *Straits Times Annual*, pp. 38-44. Singapore National Library Lee Kong Chian Reference Library microfilm reel NL 7746.

Tyers, Ray. "On the Waterfront." *The Straits Times Annual for 1972*, pp. 146-153.

Winstedt, Sir Richard. "Singapore, Past and Present." *British Malaya*, March 1938, pp. 267-269.

Wurtzburg, C.E. "History of the Association Part 1." *Malaya*, February 1952, pp. 25-27.

Wurtzburg, C.E. "History of the Association Part II." *Malaya*, March 1952, pp. 23-24, and 26.

Wurtzburg, C.E. (?) "Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society." *British Malaya*, June 1948, p. 27. (The author of this article is listed as C.E.W.)

## *Bibliography*

### **Unpublished Theses, Dissertations, and Academic Exercises**

Chia Beng Imm, Grace. "Asian Members of the Straits Settlements Legislative Council (1908-1941)." An Academic Exercise Presented as Part Requirement for The Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honours in History. Department of History, University of Malaya, Singapore, 1960.

Chua Ai Lin. "Negotiating National Identity: The English-Speaking Domiciled Communities in Singapore, 1930-1941." M.A. thesis, Department of History, National University of Singapore, 2001.

Hsieh, Jiann. "Internal Structure and Socio-Cultural Change: A Chinese Case in the Multi-Ethnic Society of Singapore." PhD Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1977.

Khaw, Patrick. "The Singapore Recreation Club: 1883-1963." B.A. Honours Thesis, Department of History, National University of Singapore, 1986/87.

Lee Su Yin. "British Chinese Policy in Singapore, 1930s to Mid-1950s: With Particular Focus on the Public Service Career of Tan Chin Tuan." MA Thesis, Department of History, National University of Singapore, 1995.

Lee Yong Hock. "A History of the Straits Chinese British Association (1900-1959)." Academic Exercise, Department of History, University of Malaya, Singapore, 1960.

Lim Li Huang, Doreen. "Designing Commerce: National Imagery in Singapore's Narratives of Modernity." B.A. Honours Thesis, Department of History, National University of Singapore, 1999/2000.

Rajpal Singh s/o Santokh Singh. "Street Naming and The Construction of the Colonial Narrative In Singapore: 1819-1942." Academic exercise, Department of History, Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, National University of Singapore, 2002.

Tan Kim Neo, Mrs. Rosie. "The Straits Chinese in Singapore: A Study of the Straits Chinese Way of Life: A Research Paper for the Dept. of Social Studies University of Malaya 1958."

Visscher, Sikko. "Business, Ethnicity and State: The Representational Relationship of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the State, 1945-1997." Ph.D. Thesis, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2002.



**Appendix:**

**Scenes of Prestige: The Built Environment and the Integration of a Multiracial Colonial Elite Class in Colonial Singapore**

What can we learn about the social structure of colonial Singapore from its built environment, its architectural artefacts and spatial layout – or, at least, those remnants of its built environment, which have somehow managed to survive into the twenty-first century? What can these artefacts tell us about the social and symbolic interactions of the inhabitants of this multiracial society, and especially of the Asian and European elites who controlled and shaped this built environment to suit their interests? Will an exploration of the social and symbolic functions of these buildings and spaces support the Furnivallian definition of the plural colonial society,<sup>1</sup> or will it lead to a reinterpretation of this concept?

One of the most important continuities in the social history of modern Singapore, from 1819 to the present day, is that this place has always been *multiracial*, and this fact is reflected in the built environment, in the names of streets and places, and in the architectural status symbols and open spaces which served as the scenes of the colonial theatre of prestige. The following pages will consider how various elements of the built environment functioned as elite status symbols within the system of status symbols that was created and elaborated by Asian and Western elites. This system attracted the participation of these elites over many generations, thereby socially and symbolically integrating these elites into a single social and symbolic structure. The participation of Asian and European elites in this symbolic system and their association with its status

---

<sup>1</sup> Regarding J.S. Furnivall's conception of the *plural society*, see: J.S. Furnivall, *Netherlands India: A Study of Plural Economy*, pp. 446 and 449; and: J.S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice*, pp. 303-305.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

symbols and with each other *defined* these elites as the leading inhabitants of colonial Singapore, and as fellow members of the multiracial elite class.

Certain elements of the cityscape of colonial Singapore functioned as particularly conspicuous status symbols, which contributed to the social integration of Asian and Western elites, despite their lack of a shared cultural identity. Elites of different racial and cultural identities gathered and mingled in the ceremonial and residential built environments that were the architectural trappings of status and prestige for these individuals, as they asserted their social standing and positioned themselves in the centre of the colonial society. A variety of places and spaces in colonial Singapore, including public buildings, private mansions, clubhouses, botanic gardens, parade grounds, and sports fields, served as prestigious venues where elites could gather and interact with one another, participate in celebrations and rituals, engage in conspicuous recreational and leisurely activities, cooperate in the promotion and display of an appropriate public image of their social class and their colonial system, and publicly affirm their membership status and rank in their cosmopolitan elite class.

The sumptuous mansions and stately public buildings of colonial Singapore provided Asian and European elites with places where they could interact, cultivate their social connections, and assert their fellowship in the cosmopolitan elite community of prestige. The design of the monumental public buildings around the Padang and Empress Place provided these elites with an elegant stage for their theatre of prestige; the classical architecture of these buildings featured imposing colonnades reminiscent of ancient Rome,<sup>2</sup> and imparted a sense of grandeur to the public ceremonies, celebrations, and

---

<sup>2</sup> See: Chua Beng-Huat, "Decoding the Political in Civic Spaces: An Interpretive Essay," in: Chua Beng-Huat and Norman Edwards, editors, *Public Space: Design, Use and Management*, pp. 56-59. See also:

## *Scenes of Prestige*

sporting events in which Asian and European elites took part together on the Esplanade or Padang, a parade ground and sports field facing the harbour with some of the most important public buildings in the background.

The Padang itself, as the prime ceremonial public space of colonial Singapore, was perhaps the pre-eminent scene of prestige here. Government House (the official residence of the governor, the local representative of the monarch),<sup>3</sup> which was opened in 1869,<sup>4</sup> provided a suitably palatial venue for gatherings of hundreds of elites (including both Asians and Europeans)<sup>5</sup> on certain special occasions, including dinners, garden parties, and dances, on the occasions of the annual celebrations of royal birthdays and the occasional receptions honouring visiting princes and other dignitaries. These settings bestowed dignity on the elite social events or rituals and those who participated in them, even as these elites enhanced each other's prestige by honouring one another with their presence, thus reducing the social distance between them and building social bridges over their cultural differences.

The availability of public buildings and spaces, as well as private mansions, as prestigious settings for elite interaction, conferred an additional element of the symbolic capital of prestige and status on those elites who participated in meetings and social

---

Raymond Betts, "The Allusion to Rome in British Imperialist Thought of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *Victorian Studies*, Volume XV, Number 2 (December 1971), pp. 149-159.

<sup>3</sup> Dato Sir Roland St. John Braddell, *The Law of the Straits Settlements: A Commentary* (1915; reprinted in 1982), p. 97.

<sup>4</sup> *Straits Times*, 30 October 1869, p. 1, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016422.

<sup>5</sup> Regarding the multiracial guests at Government House functions, see, for example, the guest lists in: *Straits Times*, 6 July 1887 (Weekly Issue), p. 11, R0011435; *Straits Times*, 25 June 1897, p. 3, R0016457; *Straits Times*, 23 June 1911, p. 7, R0016518; *Malaya Tribune*, May 20, 1937, p. 10, R0005944; and the personal recollections in: George L. Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, p. 36; J.S.M. Rennie, *Musings of J.S.M.R. Mostly Malayan*, (1933), pp. 61-62; and: Margaret C. Wilson, *Malaya: The Land of Enchantment* (1937?), p. 115. See also the extract from a farewell address presented to Governor Sir Andrew Clarke in 1875 by prominent Chinese businessmen of Singapore, including Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa and Tan Kim Ching, quoted in: Colonel R.H. Vetch, editor, *Life of Lieut.-General the Hon. Sir Andrew Clarke, G.C.M.G., C.B., C.I.E.*, p. 181.

### *Scenes of Prestige*

events in these places, as these elites associated with one another in distinctive settings. The public built environment also provided a space where the names of monarchs, imperial heroes, and local Asian and European elites could be publicly commemorated and enshrined together, emphasising their prestige and asserting their association together as members of the elite social class, by locating them in the same physical space, much as they were also located together in the same region of social space, at the apex of the colonial society.<sup>6</sup> By donating funds towards important institutions, such as schools and places of worship, elites could have the satisfaction of seeing their names carved in stone commemorative tablets that were conspicuously and permanently displayed in monumental buildings, in the company of the names of their fellow elites; examples include the marble tablets at the entrance of the St. Joseph's Institution (now the Singapore Art Museum), and another marble tablet at the former Raffles College in the Oei Tiong Ham Hall (which now houses the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy); these tablets list the names of local Asian and European colonial elites, and have remained on display into the twenty-first century.<sup>7</sup> Thus, long after their deaths and the end of the colonial system to which they belonged, the names of these Asian and European colonial elites are still associated with one another, and with the monumental landmarks which were produced by their social order. The durability of these status symbols is a testament to these elites' success in the representation of their class.

---

<sup>6</sup> I am grateful to A/P Maurizio Peleggi for urging me to read Rajpal Singh's thought-provoking thesis, "Street Naming & The Construction Of The Colonial Narrative In Singapore: 1819-1942," and for discussing this thesis with me in 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Regarding the commemorative tablet in Oei Tiong Ham Hall at Raffles College, see: *Malaya Tribune*, April 22, 1929, p. 3, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0005872. See also: *Straits Times*, 23 July 1929, in the Raffles Scrapbook, NUS Central Library Rare Books collection, Stack # R4091.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

The colonial state had a *theatrical* element, to borrow an image from the classic work on the traditional Balinese state by Clifford Geertz.<sup>8</sup> The grand mansions and stately public buildings, the major thoroughfares and open spaces, provided the dignified stages for the colonial society's theatre of prestige, where Asian elites and their European fellow elites took part together in performances that were rich in symbolic and status-conferring significance. They cooperated in creating the stages for this theatre – the scenes of prestige – and they invested these scenes, together with the rituals and institutions of which these scenes were the settings, with symbolic meaning, consecrating them as the central status symbols of the colonial society. They pooled their symbolic resources in these symbols, in the settings and ritual performances of the theatre of prestige, giving their class a sense of unity and centrality;<sup>9</sup> their involvement with these symbols and performances located them in the centre of the colonial society and conferred benefits of personal prestige and status upon them as individuals, at the same time that this combined them into a community of prestige. Their sharing or communion in the consumption of these symbolic goods transcended the racial and ethnic diversity of this society at the elite level, providing the Settlement with a symbolic centre which functioned as a social magnet, attracting socially-ambitious individuals to combine into a single elite social class through the generations.

---

<sup>8</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*.

<sup>9</sup> On the concepts of *centricity* and *pooling*, see: Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, pp. 188-190.

## **The Physical Layout of Singapore Town**

The physical layout of the town facilitated the interaction of people of different racial and ethnic identities from the early years of the Settlement. It might be supposed that the spatial layout of colonial Singapore, with different localities associated with specific ethnic groups, must have functioned to segregate these groups; however, this layout, featuring wide, mostly straight thoroughfares that crisscrossed the Settlement at right angles (as Raffles decreed in 1822<sup>10</sup>), actually facilitated the free movement of the inhabitants from one locality to another. As the town expanded over the years, the main thoroughfares lengthened, thereby sustaining and elaborating the warp and woof of the street system that knit together the different sections of the town.

Two parallel major thoroughfares which have different names for different segments (North Bridge Road / South Bridge Road and Kallang Road / Victoria Street / Hill Street / New Bridge Road / Eu Tong Sen Street) provided the town with a double spinal column, so to speak, while they were intersected at right angles by Balestier Road / Lavender Street / Crawford Street, Syed Alwi / Jalan Sultan, Weld Road / Arab Street, Bukit Timah Road / Rochor Road, Middle Road, Orchard Road / Bras Basah Road, Stamford Road, Coleman Street, High Street, Havelock Road / Pickering Street / Church Street, and Cross Street. Two more spinal columns appeared inland from the double spinal column: Jalan Besar / Bencoolen Street and Serangoon Road / Selegie Road. These two inland thoroughfares linked the core of the town to the area which became known as Little India, and this name, along with the Arab, Chinese, European, and Malay names of the major thoroughfares listed above, reflects the ethnic variety of the

---

<sup>10</sup> Sir Stamford Raffles, instructions regarding the planning of the town, dated 4 November 1822, in: C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 84, paragraph 15.

### *Scenes of Prestige*

population that was linked together by this layout. These major thoroughfares provided the town with a crucial skeleton, around which it could grow and spread organically in all directions, yet still remain fully interconnected.

The town's physical layout was clearly conducive to bringing people together. There were no walls, city gates, barricades, or checkpoints to prevent people from proceeding from Rochor to Chinatown, from Toa Payoh to the Padang. This street layout that promoted the movement of people from one area to another was a perfectly natural development in a Settlement devoted to trade, where merchants of different races routinely engaged in business transactions with one another. If the town planners of colonial Singapore had wanted to keep the races apart, this was obviously not the way to do it. While the town's layout provided special areas for various ethnic groups, it certainly did not segregate them in the sense of keeping them apart. On the other hand, if the colonial cityscape had been designed primarily for the display of imperial power or for the rapid deployment of security personnel to suppress riots, we would expect the street layout to have assumed a star-shaped pattern, with the major thoroughfares radiating outward like the spokes in a wheel, and, in the central hub, a citadel, in which the government offices would take shelter, huddled behind ramparts next to the army barracks, surrounded by thick walls and a deep moat.

However, Singapore's streetscape did not conform to such an image; the public buildings stood apart from the military barracks and police stations, and were exposed to public view, while the streets followed a grid plan, rather than a star-shaped arrangement. Indeed, the overall history of garrisons and fortifications in colonial Singapore was a story of the relocation of the armed forces' presence from the centre of the town to the

periphery and beyond: the Indian soldiers were originally encamped at or near the Padang,<sup>11</sup> but soon moved to the Short Street area,<sup>12</sup> then to an area that became known as Sepoy Lines,<sup>13</sup> where there is still a Cantonment Road. The battery at the Padang disappeared, as did Fort Fullerton. Fort Canning was built, but then the authorities apparently decided to leave it without a proper garrison.<sup>14</sup> New fortifications were built off-shore on Pulau Blakang Mati, while Fort Tanjong Katong appeared and disappeared. The story of the steady migration of defence installations away from town culminated before World War Two, with the construction of naval and air bases on the northern coast of the island. The forts and bases were evidently built more to defend the island from external attack than to control the local population.

The town was clearly not designed with the primary objective of facilitating the imperial oppression of a hostile colonised population – which would suggest that the population was not generally hostile, or at least that the elites did not perceive the masses to be likely to rebel. Instead, the town was designed and grew mainly for the benefit and convenience of merchants and capitalists of different races, who wanted to make money by doing business together. The location of important governmental buildings in public places, set some distance apart from barracks and police stations, may be interpreted as an expression of confidence on the part of the elites of the colonial state: a public statement to the effect that they were not too worried about the possibility of rebellion by the Chinese majority, because they were confident that the local Chinese community

---

<sup>11</sup> Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, *The Hikayat Abdullah: The Autobiography of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir (1797-1854)*, translated by A.H. Hill, pp. 281-282, and footnote 1 on p. 282.

<sup>12</sup> John N. Miksic, "From Fieldworks to Fort Canning 1823-1866," in: Malcolm H. Murfett *et al.*, *Between Two Oceans*, p. 57.

<sup>13</sup> C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*, p. 27; Edwin Lee, *Historic Buildings*, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Chiang Ming Shun, "Britannia Rules the Waves? Singapore and Imperial Defence 1867-1891," in: Malcolm H. Murfett *et al.*, *Between Two Oceans*, p. 110.



### *Scenes of Prestige*

leadership was closely allied with the colonial state, while the masses were generally compliant. Similarly, the location of the mansions of the Asian elites and European elites in suburban neighbourhoods, apparently without any sort of fortifications around them, could be interpreted as an expression of confidence on the part of these elites, in the generally compliant attitude of the general population.

From the early days of the Settlement, people of various ethnic identities lived close together, within a rational street grid that facilitated interactions among them. Even Chinatown was not completely Chinese. There was evidently an Indian presence in Chinatown from the early years of the Settlement, and their presence resulted in the construction of Hindu and Indian Muslim places of worship in this locality. In addition, another mosque built by one of the early leaders of the local Arab community. Syed Omar bin Ali Al-Junied, who settled in Singapore in 1819,<sup>15</sup> gave the island its first mosque in 1820, the Omar Kampong Malacca Mosque, separated from Havelock Road by what would become the site of the Ministry of Manpower Building. Chinatown is also home to the Sri Mariamman Temple and the Jamae Mosque in South Bridge Road, as well as the Al-Abrar Mosque and the Nagore Durgha Shrine in Telok Ayer Street, all historic places of worship associated with early Indian immigrants to colonial Singapore.<sup>16</sup>

It should be no surprise that, just as there were non-Chinese in Chinatown, so too there were Chinese and other Asians in what might be thought of as European localities. George Coleman, Singapore's first leading architect, built an elegant Palladian mansion *circa* 1840 for Miss Takoyee Manuk at the corner of Coleman Street and North Bridge

---

<sup>15</sup> C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*, pp. 400, 405, 406, 437, and 439. See also: Edwin Lee, *Historic Buildings of Singapore*, p. 7.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

Road, near the churchyard which is now the grounds of St. Andrew's Cathedral. The house of Miss Takoyee Manuk was a two-storey Georgian mansion featuring a grand portico with six massive ionic columns. According to Lee Kip Lin, Tan Tock Seng's eldest son, Tan Kim Ching, who was the head of the Hokkien Huay Kuan and Siamese Consul-General, demolished Miss Takoyee Manuk's mansion and replaced it with another mansion, called Siam House.<sup>17</sup> King Chulalongkorn of Siam stayed at Siam House during his visit to Singapore in 1890, and the mansion served as the first schoolhouse of the Toh Lam School in the early twentieth century, before Sir Manasseh Meyer purchased it for redevelopment.<sup>18</sup>

Even what was once a largely European residential area along Beach Road became over time a predominantly Asian neighbourhood: Chinese shophouses started to replace the old mansions along Beach Road around 1880,<sup>19</sup> and the area eventually became predominantly inhabited by Chinese.<sup>20</sup> The Beach Road vicinity became particularly associated with the Hainanese section of the local Chinese population.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, George Coleman's own home in Coleman Street, a mansion completed in 1829 and measuring 14,500 square feet, became the London Hotel in 1841.<sup>22</sup> The wealthy opium merchant Tan Yeok Nee made Coleman's old mansion into his own home, sometime in the late nineteenth century. After Tan Yeok Nee built his traditional Chinese-style mansion (which still stands, at the corner of Clemenceau Avenue and

---

<sup>17</sup> Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*, pp. 30-36 and 203.

<sup>18</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 205 and 259.

<sup>19</sup> C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 376.

<sup>20</sup> John Dill Ross, *Sixty Years: Life and Adventure in the Far East*, Volume One, p. 58; Brenda S.A. Yeoh, *Contesting Space: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment in Colonial Singapore*, p. 45.

<sup>21</sup> B.W. Hodder, "Racial Groupings in Singapore," *The Malayan Journal of Tropical Geography*, Volume One (October 1953), p. 34.

<sup>22</sup> Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*, p. 33.

Penang Road), Coleman's old house became the Hotel de la Paix.<sup>23</sup> This hotel eventually declined into a boarding house, and by the end of the colonial era it had been divided into shops. Coleman's old mansion was finally torn down in the 1960s, and replaced by the high-rise Peninsula Hotel in 1971.<sup>24</sup>

### **Raffles Place – The Prestigious Business Centre**

It is clear from the historical evidence that even what might be considered the most *European* of the public spaces in colonial Singapore – namely, the business district around Raffles Place,<sup>25</sup> and the civic centre, including the Padang and Empress Place – were actually shared by Asians, especially Asian business elites, as well as by their European fellow elites. In a Settlement that was devoted to commerce, Raffles Place was the symbolic heart of the local business scene,<sup>26</sup> where some of the most important firms and banks were based. While it is true that some of these economic institutions were owned by Europeans, Raffles Place was certainly not a segregated, exclusively European business district during the colonial era; in fact, it was clearly shared by both Asians and Europeans. After all, the Europeans could not have succeeded in their business and banking ventures without the close cooperation of Asian businessmen, just as much of the revenue base of the local colonial system – which allowed Singapore to remain a free port – depended until the early twentieth century upon the activities of wealthy Chinese

---

<sup>23</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 335.

<sup>24</sup> John Bertram van Cuylenburg, *Singapore Through Sunshine and Shadow*, pp. 34-35; George L. Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, p. 129; Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*, p. 370.

<sup>25</sup> Regarding the supposedly *English* nature of Raffles Place, see the first-hand observation from 1899, in: Fred Riley, *A Trip Round the World: Being Jottings Made on a Tour from London to Liverpool, via Africa, Asia, Australia, and America* (1900), quoted in: John Bastin, *Travellers' Singapore: An Anthology*, p. 159.

<sup>26</sup> A. Wright and H.A. Cartwright, editors, *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya* (1908), p. 937.

opium merchants.<sup>27</sup> Asians took part in the life of Raffles Place by doing business there, as well as by owning properties around the Square.

Raffles Place (also known as Raffles Square) was quite literally created by order of Sir Stamford Raffles himself. He not only designated this area as the business district in 1822,<sup>28</sup> he also personally supervised the reclamation of this muddy locality by Chinese, Malay, and Indian workers, who levelled a hill in the Raffles Place area and used the material to fill in the nearby swamp to create Boat Quay.<sup>29</sup> In October 1822, Raffles moved into a house along the river, near the future site of Raffles Place; his brother-in-law, Captain William Flint, also lived there, on or near the site along Flint Street, which is now occupied by Maybank.<sup>30</sup> Raffles lived in the area between Boat Quay and the future site of Raffles Place until the completion of his bungalow on Singapore Hill (the future Fort Canning Hill).<sup>31</sup> The multiracial tradition of Raffles Place as a place for the business elites of different races began with the establishment of this locality as the premier business district in the Settlement. Raffles specifically decreed that the Boat Quay and Raffles Place area was intended for *both* non-Europeans and Europeans alike.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, among the first businessmen to move to Raffles Place were

---

<sup>27</sup> Wong Lin Ken, "Commercial Growth before the Second World War," in: Ernest C.T. Chew and Edwin Lee, editors, *A History of Singapore*, p. 54.

<sup>28</sup> See the instructions issued by Sir Stamford Raffles, dated 4 November 1822, paragraph 8, quoted in: C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 83.

<sup>29</sup> C.E. Wurtzburg, *Raffles of the Eastern Isles*, pp. 608-609; C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, pp. 75 and 88-89; Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, *The Hikayat Abdullah: The Autobiography of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir (1797-1854)*, translated by A.H. Hill, pp. 164-167; Sir Stamford Raffles, quoted in: Lady Raffles, *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles* (1830; reprinted in 1991), pp. 537 and 538.

<sup>30</sup> Ray Tyers, "On the Waterfront," *The Straits Times Annual for 1972*, p. 147.

<sup>31</sup> Capt. H.F. Pearson, "Singapore from the Sea, June 1823. Notes on a Recently Discovered Sketch attributed to Lt. Phillip Jackson." *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume 26, Part I, July 1953, p. 51.

<sup>32</sup> Sir Stamford Raffles, instructions dated 4 November 1822, paragraph 8, quoted in: C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 83.

Naraina Pillai and Tan Che Sang,<sup>33</sup> indicating that his vision for a multiracial commercial centre rapidly became a reality.

The Boat Quay and Raffles Place area was probably the first reclamation project in the history of Singapore – the first in a long line of reclamation works undertaken on this island. The Boat Quay side of the Singapore River became the home of the business premises and *godowns* or warehouses of both Asian and European merchants, while the opposite side of the river became the site of public buildings near the river's mouth, and godowns upstream. According to one account that was written in 1864, there were some European godowns located near the mouth of the Singapore River, while all of the other godowns along the river belonged to Chinese.<sup>34</sup>

The centre of the business district that began with the reclamations supervised by Raffles in 1822 became known, most appropriately, as Commercial Square, but in 1858 the Municipal Commissioners renamed it Raffles Place.<sup>35</sup> Yet, despite its European name, the Asian connections with Raffles Place must not be overlooked. In the 1880s, auctions in Raffles Place were conducted in the Malay language, for audiences of potential buyers who were mostly Asians.<sup>36</sup> This language was the business lingua franca of colonial Singapore, spoken by Chinese and Europeans as well as Malays.<sup>37</sup> The use of the Malay language in Raffles Place emphasised the ethnic diversity of this locality, as a meeting place of business men of different races.

---

<sup>33</sup> C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*, p. 21.

<sup>34</sup> John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India: Being a Descriptive Account of Singapore, Penang, Province Wellesley, and Malacca; Their Peoples, Products, Commerce, and Government*, p. 56. This book was written in 1864 and published in 1865.

<sup>35</sup> C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 667.

<sup>36</sup> T.J. Keaughran, *Picturesque and Busy Singapore* (1887), p. 36.

<sup>37</sup> John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions* (1865), p. 257 (footnote); Rev. G.M. Reith, *Handbook to Singapore with Map*, Second Edition, Revised by Walter Makepeace (1907), and republished in 1985, p. 77; George Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, pp. 92-93.

Raffles Place, previously called Commercial Square, was not only created by Asians, but was also largely owned by it – much of the property around the Square belonged to Asians throughout the colonial era, symbolising their significant stakeholderhood in the colonial system, as important investors or shareholders in the Empire. Asians already owned much of the land around Commercial Square in the 1820s.<sup>38</sup> In 1823, Tan Che Sang opened a warehouse in Commercial Square.<sup>39</sup> In 1826, Chin Seng, Choa Chong Long, Kiong Kong Tuan, Lim Si Ong, Si Hoo Keh, and Tan Che Sang acquired titles to plots of land in Commercial Square and its vicinity, on which they may have already constructed buildings.<sup>40</sup> Nearly a century later, an account published in 1923 noted that more than one office building in the Raffles Place area was owned by Cheang Jim Chuan, a son and heir of Cheang Hong Lim, who was a prominent opium merchant and Justice of the Peace in Singapore in the 1870s.<sup>41</sup> Alkaff and Company, a firm owned by a famous local Arab family, was reputed to be the leading private property owner in Singapore in the early twentieth century.<sup>42</sup> In 1940, the estate of the late Tan Choon Bock (one of the founders of the Straits Steamship Company) still owned property in the Raffles Place area.<sup>43</sup> The extensive stakeholderhood of wealthy Asians in the property around Raffles Place is all the more significant when it is considered that the

---

<sup>38</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 25-26; Leong Foke Meng, "Early Land Transactions in Singapore: The Real Estates of William Farquhar (1774-1839), John Crawford (1783-1868), and Their Families," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume LXXVII, Part 1 (June 2004), pp. 23-42; see especially pp. 37 and 42.

<sup>39</sup> Leong Foke Meng, "Early Land Transactions in Singapore: The Real Estates of William Farquhar (1774-1839), John Crawford (1783-1868), and Their Families," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume LXXVII, Part 1 (June 2004), p. 28, footnote 31.

<sup>40</sup> Regarding Choa Chong Long, Kiong Kong Tuan, Si Hoo Keh, and Tan Che Sang, see: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 25. Regarding Lim Si Ong and Chin Seng, see: "Portuguese Missions Ordinance," in: *The Laws of the Straits Settlements Edition of 1936. In Five Volumes*, Volume V, Chapter 251, Schedule C, p. 684.

<sup>41</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore* (1923), p. 271.

<sup>42</sup> Arnold Wright and H.A. Cartwright, eds., *Twentieth Century Impressions* (1908), p. 710.

<sup>43</sup> K.G. Tregonning, "Tan Cheng Lock: A Malayan Nationalist," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Volume X, Number 1 (March 1979), p. 46, footnote 37.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

1931 census report noted that property in the centre of the town of Singapore was worth more than property in Piccadilly, in the heart of London's fashionable West End.<sup>44</sup>

Asian elites were responsible for much of the development of business premises in the Raffles Place locality. The prestigious quality of Raffles Place as the premier business centre and meeting place of businessmen of different races was enhanced by the elegance of the imposing buildings that were built there.<sup>45</sup> The Meyer Chambers building was owned by Sir Manasseh Meyer, who was born in Baghdad and became a Municipal Commissioner and a leading member of the Jewish community in Singapore.<sup>46</sup> Around the close of the nineteenth century, Lim Loh built a three-storey building on a property in Raffles Place, which he purchased in 1897; this property seems to have previously belonged at different times to Khoo Cheng Tiong, Phyat Wichit Rajah, and Khoo Tiong Poh.<sup>47</sup> Alkaff and Company opened the Alkaff Arcade in 1909, an office building which faced Raffles Place on one side and Collyer Quay on the other. The Alkaff Arcade's ornate Indo-Saracenic seaward-facing façade was long a prominent and picturesque feature of Collyer Quay, the bund of colonial Singapore. At the time of its formal opening ceremony, which was attended by European guests, the Alkaff Arcade's tenants included the Standard Oil Company and the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company, better known as the P&O.<sup>48</sup> The Alkaff Arcade was a landmark building in the Raffles Place area for many years, until it was replaced in 1981 by a new

---

<sup>44</sup> C.A. Vlieland, *British Malaya ... A Report on the 1931 Census*, p. 12, paragraph 50.

<sup>45</sup> John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions* (1865), p. 52.

<sup>46</sup> Eze Nathan, *The History of Jews in Singapore 1830-1945*, p. 30.

<sup>47</sup> Lim Loh's property in Raffles Place was involved in a legal case which was appealed to the Privy Council. See: "Nye Rai, Administrator of Prah Primoon Sombat Puket (deceased) Appellant v Lim Loh Respondent," 18 December 1901, in: Dato' Visu Sinnadurai, editor, *The Privy Council Cases: Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei: 1875-1990*, Volume One, p. 40. See also: Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 311-312.

<sup>48</sup> *Straits Times*, 27 November 1909, p. 7, and 29 November 1909, p. 7, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016509.

Arcade.<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile, in the 1950s, near the end of the colonial era, the eighteen-storey Bank of China building took its own prominent place in the Raffles Place locality, at Battery Road and Flint Street.<sup>50</sup>

Raffles Place or Commercial Square was clearly a place of business for Asians as well as Europeans. Indeed, Raffles Place is adjacent to Chinatown, as well as to Boat Quay, another predominantly Chinese area, and Raffles Place may be described as having been embraced by the larger Asian business district, so much so that Raffles Place might even be described as a multiracial locality *within* Chinatown; but Asian businessmen have long been doing business *in* Raffles Place as well as around it. For example, M. Moses had a shop in Commercial Square in 1843.<sup>51</sup> The firm of Little, Cursetjee & Company was established at Commercial Square in 1845 by John Little and Cursetjee Frommurzee, a Parsi merchant.<sup>52</sup> In 1846, the Asian firms in Commercial Square included: the Arab merchants Sayd Aboubakar and Sayd Omar, the Armenian merchants Catchick Moses (of Sarkies and Moses), Parsick Joaquim, and Barsick Joseph; the Jewish merchants Sassoon Juddah and Sassoon Gubboy (of Juddah and Gubboy), and Nazim J. Ezra; the Mughal merchant Hadjee Abdul Gaffer, and the Parsi merchant Frommurze Sorabjee.<sup>53</sup>

In 1869 – eleven years after the Square was named Raffles Place – the businesses there included the Chinese firms Geok Teat & Company and Eng Siew & Company.<sup>54</sup>

An account published in 1875 described a visit by a European to a shop in Raffles Place

---

<sup>49</sup> Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*, p. 447.

<sup>50</sup> Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*, p. 416.

<sup>51</sup> *Singapore Free Press*, 2 March 1843, p. 3, Singapore National Library microfilm reel NL1558.

<sup>52</sup> C.B. Buckley, *An Anecdotal History*, p. 350. See also the mention of Little, Cursetjee & Co. in Commercial Square, in the *Singapore Free Press*, 3 June 1853, p. 2, NUS microfilm reel R0006018.

<sup>53</sup> See the 1846 edition of *The Straits Times Almanack, Calendar and Directory*, pp. 53-61, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0011768.

<sup>54</sup> *Straits Times*, 4 December 1869, p. 1, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016422.



owned by a well-to-do Chinese businessman.<sup>55</sup> In the 1880s, Raffles Place featured Arab, Armenian, Chinese, Jewish, and Parsi firms. In 1888, the business establishments in Raffles Place included those of Abdulyeb Essmailjee, Bakar Bin Shaban & Company, I.R. Belilios, Burjorjee Khodadad & Company, Geok Swee & Company, Hoon Keat & Company, Hormusjee Pestonjee & Company, S. Manasseh & Company, Meyer Brothers (including Manasseh Meyer), H. Rajbhoy & Company, Sarkies & Moses, A.S. Shooker, E.A. Solomon & Company, and Elias Solomon,<sup>56</sup> while those nearby in Battery Road included Alsagoff & Company, Ann Lock & Company, Geok Teat & Company, and Moses & Company.<sup>57</sup>

The strong Asian presence in Raffles Place continued into the twentieth century. A number of Asian companies, businessmen and professionals were based in premises in Raffles Place in the early twentieth century, including the Indian mercantile firm of M.S.E. Angullia & Company,<sup>58</sup> the Chinese mercantile firm of Hoon Keat & Company,<sup>59</sup> the Japanese dentist Dr. S. Iwatsubo,<sup>60</sup> the Japanese steamship company Nippon Yusen Kaisha,<sup>61</sup> the Japanese curio shop of G. Otomune & Company,<sup>62</sup> the Chinese steamship company of Soon Keck, Limited,<sup>63</sup> and the tailoring and outfitting firm of Wai Seng & Company, founded by Ho Siak Ki.<sup>64</sup> The Raffles Chambers building in Raffles Place

---

<sup>55</sup> John Thomson, *The Straits of Malacca Indo-China and China or Ten Years' Travels, Adventures and Residence Abroad* (1875), reprinted in part as: *The Straits of Malacca, Siam and Indo-China*, p. 57.

<sup>56</sup> *The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1888*, pp. 122, 124, 125, 127, 131, 134, 142, 146, 147, 148, and 149, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0011833.

<sup>57</sup> Regarding Battery Road, see: *The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1888*, pp. 123, 131, and 143.

<sup>58</sup> Wright and Cartwright, *Twentieth Century Impressions* (1908), p. 708.

<sup>59</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore* (1923), p. 67.

<sup>60</sup> Wright and Cartwright, *Twentieth Century Impressions* (1908), p. 640.

<sup>61</sup> *The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1919*, p. 123.

<sup>62</sup> Wright and Cartwright, *Twentieth Century Impressions* (1908), p. 707.

<sup>63</sup> *The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1919*, p. 123.

<sup>64</sup> Wright and Cartwright, *Twentieth Century Impressions* (1908), p. 722.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

was the home of the (Hokkien Chinese) Ho Hong Bank,<sup>65</sup> the Mitsubishi Shoja Kaisha,<sup>66</sup> and the Chinese stevedoring and lighterage firm of Soh Boon Hup,<sup>67</sup> as well as the Garden Club, a prestigious Chinese social club founded in 1916 with Dr. Lim Boon Keng as its first president.<sup>68</sup> Some Asian firms were located near Raffles Place in Battery Road, such as A. Abbas,<sup>69</sup> Alsagoff & Company,<sup>70</sup> Ann Lock & Company,<sup>71</sup> the Bank of Taiwan,<sup>72</sup> and Mitsui Bussan Kaisha, Ltd.<sup>73</sup>

The names of Asian firms in Raffles Place listed above show that there was a strong Asian presence in Raffles Place at different times in the colonial era. It is clear that Asian businessmen were never excluded from this prestigious centre of commerce. This Asian presence was not limited to only the early years, or middle years, or late years, of the colonial era. In fact, by exploring the listings of Asian businesses and their street addresses in the annual local directories, which are extant for 1846 and most of the rest of the years of the colonial era, it would be easy to prove that there was a continuous Asian presence in Raffles Place *throughout* the colonial era. However, the sample of names listed above should be sufficient to drive home the point that Raffles Place was *always* a multiracial business centre – it was always Asian *and* European, rather than a merely Western business centre. The close proximity of the offices of Asian and Western businessmen and professionals in Raffles Place reflected their mutually-beneficial

---

<sup>65</sup> *The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1919*, p. 116.

<sup>66</sup> *The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1919*, p. 195.

<sup>67</sup> *Malaya Tribune*, 16 May 1924, p. 6, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0005841.

<sup>68</sup> Regarding the Garden Club, see: *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, Vol. LI, No. 75, 14 July 1916, p. 1154, Notification No. 846; Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore* (1923), pp. 534-535, and: the minutes of a meeting of the General Committee of the Garden Club on 25 November 1931, in the Minute Book of the Garden Club, Singapore National Archives microfilm reel NA 110, "The Garden Club Minutes of Meetings 1931-1974."

<sup>69</sup> *The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1919*, p. 132.

<sup>70</sup> *The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1919*, p. 135.

<sup>71</sup> *The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1919*, p. 136.

<sup>72</sup> *The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1919*, p. 119.

<sup>73</sup> *The Singapore and Straits Directory for 1919*, p. 195.

economic interdependence, their close cooperation in managing the colonial economy and sharing the economic and symbolic benefits which the colonial system provided for them.<sup>74</sup> Raffles Place symbolised the close economic interdependence of Asian and Western economic interests in Singapore and Malaya.

In addition to serving as a centre of business, banking, and professional activities, Raffles Place was also a fashionable retail shopping district during much, if not all, of the colonial era. By the early decades of the twentieth century, there were three fashionable department stores in the Raffles Place locality: Robinson's, John Little's, and Whiteaway's. Robinson's and John Little's each opened in Raffles Place in the mid-nineteenth century, while Whiteaway's (short for Whiteaway Laidlaw) was located in Battery Road, on the site now occupied by the Maybank Tower, in an imposing building which was completed in June 1915.<sup>75</sup> Although the stores in Raffles Place were described as *European*,<sup>76</sup> probably because they offered goods which were desired by the European population (for example, George Peet bought his *sola topee* at Robinson's in 1923),<sup>77</sup> these department stores were also patronised by well-to-do Asians, which reflects the demand for Western goods among prosperous Asians, as well as the fact that these stores were open to anyone who could afford to shop there. Thus, to assume that these so-called *European* department stores were only for Europeans would be as much of a mistake as it would be to assume that Asian shops and restaurants were only for Asian customers and diners. Lee Hoon Leong, a wealthy businessman, provided an

---

<sup>74</sup> Compare this with Marie-Claire Bergère's description of the central district in Shanghai's International Settlement, in: Marie-Claire Bergère, *The Golden Age of the Chinese Bourgeoisie 1911-1937*, p. 110.

<sup>75</sup> Makepeace et al., Vol. 2, p. 608; Norman Edwards and Peter Keys. *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*, p. 415.

<sup>76</sup> Margaret C. Wilson, *Malaya: The Land of Enchantment* (1937?), p. 106; Sir Richard Winstedt, "Singapore, Past and Present," *British Malaya* (magazine), March 1938, p. 269.

<sup>77</sup> George L. Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, p. 22.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

unlimited account with Robinson's and John Little's to his son, Lee Chin Koon.<sup>78</sup> Lee Kip Lee recalled that his family went shopping at Robinson's, John Little's, and Whiteaway's, when he was a child in the 1930s, and that his father bought elegant clothing from H.B. Winter, a tailor in Battery Road.<sup>79</sup> Clearly, wealth was the important factor here, rather than racial identity; if anyone was excluded from shopping in these prestigious department stores, they were excluded because of their poverty, and not because of their race.

Another indication of the Asian influence in the Raffles Place area was the presence of Asian food in this locality. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Battery Road and Bonham Street were known as the haunt of Chinese hawkers.<sup>80</sup> The foods provided by street vendors in the Raffles Place area were evidently popular with Asians and Europeans alike.<sup>81</sup> In the 1930s, both Asians and Europeans ate lunch at the G.H. Café in Battery Road, which served Asian foods, including curry.<sup>82</sup> The G.H. Café's owner was a Parsi businessman, and the multiracial Singapore Rotary Club met there immediately following the end of World War Two.<sup>83</sup> Speaking of clubs, other prestigious clubs which met in the Raffles Place area included the (European) Singapore Club which met near Raffles Place in the Exchange Building and, later, in its successor, the Fullerton Building, and the (Chinese) Garden Club, which met in the Raffles

---

<sup>78</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew*, p. 25.

<sup>79</sup> Lee Kip Lee, *Amber Sands: A Boyhood Memoir* (1995 edition), pp. 5 and 26. See the advertisement for H.B. Winter at 20 Battery Road, in the 1936 edition of the *Straits Times Annual*, p. 40, on Singapore National Library microfilm reel NL 7746.

<sup>80</sup> J.S.M. Rennie, *Musings of J.S.M.R. Mostly Malayan*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>81</sup> E.A. Brown, *Indiscreet Memories*, p. 33.

<sup>82</sup> George L. Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, pp. 94 and 95. See the photo of Europeans in the G.H. Café in *British Malaya*, August 1936, p. 85.

<sup>83</sup> Rajabali Jumabhoy, quoted in: Melanie Chew, *Leaders of Singapore*, pp. 62 and 63; and: Rajabali Jumabhoy, *Multiracial Singapore – On to the Nineties*, (1990), p. 65.

Chambers building in Raffles Place, and later in the China Building in Chulia Street.<sup>84</sup>

Participation in social clubs was thus another activity which was associated with the Raffles Place area by elite Asians and Europeans alike.

Aside from being an important business centre in colonial Singapore, Raffles Place was also a ceremonial location – a potential venue for parades. Since Asians were present in Raffles Place, it was only natural for them to participate in a royal celebration there. When Prince Alfred, the Duke of Edinburgh and second son of Queen Victoria, visited Singapore in 1869, the shops in Raffles Place were decorated in his honour, including the establishments of Geok Teat & Company and Eng Siew & Company, as well as their European neighbours. A procession of carriages carrying Prince Alfred and other dignitaries drove from Johnston's Pier to Raffles Place by way of Collyer Quay and De Souza Street. After parading around Raffles Place, the procession continued through Malacca Street, Market Street, and Boat Quay, and finally went over Elgin Bridge and across the Singapore River to High Street and the Esplanade. The procession ended at the Town Hall in the civic centre, where an address to Prince Alfred was presented, on behalf of the Chinese community, by Tan Kim Ching, a wealthy businessman, head of

---

<sup>84</sup> On the opening of the Garden Club in 1916, see: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 534-535. The Garden Club was meeting in the Raffles Chambers as early as 1919 – *Singapore Free Press*, 7 January 1919, p. 10, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0006130. It was still in Raffles Chambers in 1931. By January 1932, the Garden Club had moved from Raffles Chambers to the China Building, in Chulia Street. The leadership of the Garden Club in the 1930s included prominent Chinese men, such as Lee Kong Chian, Lim Bock Kee, the Hon. Dr. Lim Han Hoe, Tan Chin Tuan, C.C. Tan, the Hon. Tay Lian Teck, and Yap Pheng Geck. See the Minute Book of the Garden Club in the National Archives of Singapore, microfilm reel NA 110. The Garden Club ceased operations in the early 1970s; see: Lee Su Yin, "British Chinese Policy in Singapore, 1930s to Mid-1950s: With Particular Focus on the Public Service Career of Tan Chin Tuan." MA Thesis, Department of History, National University of Singapore, 1995, p. 22.

the Hokkien Huay Kuan, and Justice of the Peace, who was the eldest son of Tan Tock Seng.<sup>85</sup>

Raffles Place was a prestigious locality for high-status business, banking, professional, and retail transactions, which served as a status symbol that was shared by prosperous Asians and Europeans alike. Although Raffles Place may have been regarded as the *European* business centre of colonial Singapore, the reputation of the Western orientation of this place must be treated with a certain amount of scepticism. It is clear that Asian merchants, capitalists, and professionals, as well as well-to-do Asian shoppers, were stakeholders in this prestigious section of the cityscape, just as much as were their European fellow elites. In looking back on the colonial past, we should not let the European name of Raffles Place obscure the fact that this area – like the rest of Singapore, and the colonial system itself – was really a scene of multiracial interaction and interdependence, in which the leading stakeholders and beneficiaries (both materially and symbolically) were Asian as well as European.

Raffles Place – as a prestigious label as well as a geographical locality – was an important status symbol within the system of status symbols within which Asian and European elites alike participated together, as they played the social game. As they made use of Raffles Place as a mark of status, they set themselves apart from the rest of the population, and located themselves together in the centre of the colonial society, in close proximity to one another in social space, as fellow members of the multiracial elite class. By associating themselves with Raffles Place, generation after generation, Asian and European elites sustained the prestigious symbolism of this name, while affirming their fellow ownership or stakeholdership in the colonial system, and helping to present an

---

<sup>85</sup> *Straits Times*, 4 December 1869, p. 1, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016422.

image of the colonial social structure as one which featured a multiracial elite class at its summit.

If Singapore, as an entrepôt, an emporium, and a centre of trade for Southeast Asia, was a place that was mainly concerned with doing business,<sup>86</sup> then Raffles Place was the central place where Asian and European economic elites met to do business together. However, contrary to the Furnivallian view of the plural colonial society, the different sections of the population of colonial Singapore did not only mingle in the economic realm. In fact, Asians and Europeans met and interacted in the theatre of prestige, as well as in the marketplace; they cooperated in the cultivation and exchange of the *symbolic capital*<sup>87</sup> of prestige and status, as well as economic capital, and the structures which imparted coherence to their colonial society were based as much upon social connections and institutions as they were upon business connections. To explore the colonial cityscape as a scene of *non-economic* interactions between elites of different races, the focus of attention will shift in the following pages, from the economic centre at Raffles Place<sup>88</sup> to the civic centre on the opposite bank of the Singapore River, where Asians and Westerners alike enacted the most spectacular performances of the colonial theatre of prestige in the Settlement of Singapore.

---

<sup>86</sup> Ernest C.T. Chew, "Founders and Builders of Early Colonial Singapore," in: Irene Lim, editor, *Sketching the Straits*, p. 30.

<sup>87</sup> Regarding *symbolic capital*, see: Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, p. 108; Bourdieu, "Rethinking the State" and "The Economy of Symbolic Goods," in: Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*, pp. 47 and 102; and: Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, pp. 22 and 53. See also the discussion of the term *prestige-symbol* in: Lyman Bryson, "Circles of Prestige," Chapter V in: Lyman Bryson, Louis Finkelstein, Hudson Hoagland, and R.M. MacIver, editors, *Symbols and Society: Fourteenth Symposium of the Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion*, pp. 79-101.

<sup>88</sup> T.J. Keaughran, *Picturesque and Busy Singapore*, p. 36; *The Straits & F.M.S. Annual 1907-8*, Singapore National Library microfilm reel NL 5876, p. 47; R.C.H. McKie, *This Was Singapore*, p. 46.

### **The Colonial Civic Centre – Empress Place and the Padang**

The colonial civic centre, at Empress Place and the Padang, belonged (like Raffles Place) to Asians as well as to Europeans. Just as it would be incorrect to imagine that Raffles Place was somehow exclusive to Europeans in the colonial era, so too there should be no misconception that the Padang belonged only to Westerners; in fact, both of these public places belonged to Asians and Europeans alike, for the entire colonial era. The civic centre grew up near the spot between the Padang and the Singapore River, where Raffles founded the Settlement in 1819 by signing the treaty with Sultan Hussein and Temenggong Abdul Rahman.<sup>89</sup> In this area were built three important civic buildings: the courthouse that became Singapore's first Parliament House; the Town Hall that became Victoria Memorial Hall, and the Government Offices building that is now the Asian Civilisations Museum. Each of these buildings featured neoclassical architectural elements. This civic district was dignified with the royal and imperial name of Empress Place in 1907.<sup>90</sup> It was colonial Singapore's answer to London's City of Westminster and Trafalgar Square, and once the Raffles Statue was relocated here in 1919, Empress Place had its answer to Nelson's Column. Empress Place was Singapore's scaled-down counterpart to the monumental ceremonial settings of London and other great capital cities of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>91</sup>

---

<sup>89</sup> See: J. Crawford, *A Diary kept on Board the Honourable Company's Surveying Ship INVESTIGATOR by J. Crawford, her Commander*, entry for 6 February 1819, pp. 104-106; Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, *The Hikayat Abdullah: The Autobiography of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir (1797-1854)*, translated by A.H. Hill, pp. 156-157; Ernest C.T. Chew, "The Foundation of a British Settlement," in: Ernest C.T. Chew and Edwin Lee, editors, *A History of Singapore*, pp. 36-40.

<sup>90</sup> Victor R. Savage and Brenda S.A. Yeoh, *Toponymics: A Study of Singapore Street Names* (Second Edition, 2004), p. 119.

<sup>91</sup> Bernard S. Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays*, p. 72; and: David Cannadine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition', c. 1820-1977," in: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, editors, *The Invention of Tradition*, pp. 126-128.



## *Scenes of Prestige*

There were other echoes of Victorian London in colonial Singapore. The clock tower of Victoria Memorial Hall is Singapore's scaled-down answer to Big Ben, and the Dalhousie Obelisk is Singapore's version of Cleopatra's Needle. St. Andrew's Cathedral, completed in 1862 in the medieval gothic tradition of Netley Abbey in Hampshire,<sup>92</sup> was the Settlement's scaled-down answer to Westminster Abbey. The domes atop Raffles Library and Museum and the Supreme Court building echo the domes of St. Paul's Cathedral and the Reading Room of the British Museum. These scaled-down parallels of imperial London were potentially meaningful not only to those who had actually lived in or visited London, but also to those who had learned about London through books, postcards, the cinema, newsreels, and word-of-mouth.

Near Empress Place is the Padang, a green parade ground and sports field, which was also known as the Esplanade and Raffles Plain.<sup>93</sup> Together, the Padang and Empress Place might be described as the ceremonial centre of colonial Singapore. The Padang was the central ceremonial stage of Singapore, and the most prominent public space in the Settlement throughout the colonial era, where Asians and Europeans took part in imperial celebrations and sporting events. This gathering place was Singapore's answer to the Roman Forum, complete with grand columned buildings along St. Andrew's Road and the landward side of the field. First there was a row of three stately Palladian mansions that were probably designed by George Coleman, and which seem to have been built between *circa* 1828 and 1840.<sup>94</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> See: Major J.F.A. McNair, *Prisoners Their Own Warders* (1899), pp. 72-74 and 97-100; John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India* (1865), p. 69; and: John Bastin, *Travellers' Singapore: An Anthology*, p. 85.

<sup>93</sup> Regarding the term *Raffles Plain*, see: Walter Makepeace, Gilbert E. Brooke, and Roland St. J. Braddell, editors, *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume Two, p. 324.

<sup>94</sup> Regarding these early mansions, see: John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India* (1865), p. 72; C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 376; and: Sir Roland St. John Braddell, "The Good Old Days,"

## *Scenes of Prestige*

The dignified architectural backdrop provided by these mansions along the St. Andrew's Road side of the Padang apparently dates from around 1828, when Governor Robert Fullerton agreed to preserve the Padang as an open space, on the understanding that the landholders along St. Andrew's Road would build *substantial* homes dignified with *ornamental* architectural styles.<sup>95</sup> The mansion facing St. Andrew's Road and the Padang that was nearest the Cricket Club was demolished at the end of the nineteenth century, while the other two (which were once the homes of Dr. William Montgomerie and Resident Councillor Thomas Church) survived as Municipal Offices into the mid-1920s.<sup>96</sup> The monumental Grand Hotel de l'Europe (also known as the *Europe Hotel*), with its long row of columns facing the Padang opposite the Cricket Club, was built *circa* 1906 on the site of the mansion that had been built around 1828.<sup>97</sup> Finally, the remaining two old mansions facing the Padang along St. Andrew's Road and the Europe Hotel were replaced by two even grander neoclassical buildings – the two remaining mansions were

---

in: Makepeace et al. (1921), Volume Two, p. 487; Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*, pp. 30 and 149; Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*, p. 373; see also the photograph and caption in: J. W. Harries, J. P., "The Singapore Municipal Commission: Some Details of the History of Singapore's Municipal System," *British Malaya*, August 1929, p. 113.

<sup>95</sup> C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 76; John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions* (1865), pp. 19-20; Capt. H.F. Pearson, "Singapore from the Sea, June 1823. Notes on a Recently Discovered Sketch attributed to Lt. Phillip Jackson," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume 26, Part I, July 1953, p. 55.

<sup>96</sup> George L. Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, p. 128; John Bertram van Cuylenburg, *Singapore Through Sunshine and Shadow*, p. 33.

<sup>97</sup> The Grand Hotel de l'Europe was apparently built on the site of an earlier hotel called the Hotel de l'Europe, possibly housed in the old mansion that was built in 1828; see: *Straits Times*, 17 May 1904, p. 5; see also: *Straits Times*, 28 October 1902, p. 4, and: 2 March 1904, p. 5. Regarding the Grand Hotel de l'Europe, see, for example: *Straits Times*, 2 March 1904, p. 5; 17 May 1904, p. 5; 24 May 1904, p. 3; 4 August 1906, p. 5; 6 November 1906, p. 7; 7 December 1906, p. 6; 8 December 1906, p. 7; 12 December 1906, p. 6; 11 January 1907, p. 7; 23 March 1910, p. 6; 26 September 1910, p. 6; 24 July 1933, p. 11; 6 August 1933, p. 8; 19 April 1936, p. 28; 2 August 1939, p. 6. See also: A. Wright and H.A. Cartwright, editors, *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya* (1908), p. 937, and: *British Malaya* magazine, May 1934, p. 8. The name "Grand Hotel de l'Europe" was in use by 1907; see, for example, *Straits Times*, 14 May 1907, p. 6.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

replaced by the Municipal Building that was opened in 1929,<sup>98</sup> and the Europe Hotel made way for the Supreme Court building that was opened in 1939.<sup>99</sup> These buildings still stand today – the Municipal Building became the City Hall when the Singapore Municipality became a City by Royal Charter in 1951.<sup>100</sup> Thus, the Padang has enjoyed an imposing backdrop of dignified neoclassical columned buildings along St. Andrew's Road continuously from at least as early as 1840 right up to the present day.

With the completion of the Municipal Building in 1929 and the Supreme Court building in 1939, the cluster of civic buildings in Empress Place was, in effect, expanding northward, along St. Andrew's Road towards the gothic St. Andrew's Cathedral. On the eve of World War Two, the Municipal Building and the Supreme Court were the architectural centrepieces of the civic district, as they still are today. The long row of massive columns across the façade of the Municipal Building suggested an image of strength and permanence, while the splendid dome atop the Supreme Court, reminiscent, perhaps, of St. Paul's Cathedral in London and St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, was the crowning glory of the setting for the colonial theatre of prestige.

These expressions of imperial confidence and durability may seem somewhat ironic, in view of the fact that the Japanese conquered Singapore in 1942, only a few years after the finishing touches were put on the Supreme Court's Renaissance dome. However, these buildings survived the Japanese occupation – indeed, after Japan was

---

<sup>98</sup> Regarding the opening of the Municipal Building in 1929, see: *Nanyang Siang Piau*, 24 July 1929, p. 6, NUS Central Library ZR04555; *Nanyang Chung Wei Pao (Union Times)*, 24 July 1929, p. 5, NUS Central Library ZR01700; and: *Malaya Tribune*, 24 July 1929, pp. 9-10, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0005874.

<sup>99</sup> Regarding the opening of the Supreme Court building in 1939, see: *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 3 August 1939, p. 1-4, NUS Central Library ZR05619; and: *Nanyang Chung Wei Pao (Union Times)*, 4 August 1939, section 1, p. 2, NUS Central Library ZR01781.

<sup>100</sup> The *Municipal Building* was still mentioned in the 1951 edition of *The Straits Times Directory of Singapore & Malaya* (p. 400); the 1952 edition (p. 421) listed *City Hall*.

defeated in 1945, General Itagaki surrendered to Lord Mountbatten inside the Municipal Building, in a ceremony attended by E.R. Koek, Dr. Lim Han Hoe (later Sir Han Hoe Lim), Dr. H.S. Moonshi, and Sultan Ibrahim of Johore, among many others.<sup>101</sup> These buildings proved to be as useful to the Republic of Singapore as they were to colonial Singapore, and they have entered the twenty-first century as treasured landmarks to be cherished and preserved. The Empire may be gone, but there is still an Empress Place in Singapore, including the Victoria Memorial Hall dedicated to the memory of the Queen-Empress, and the statue of Raffles, the imperial hero, still stands on its pedestal in front of this Hall. The durability of these buildings and monuments as civic symbols and stage settings for National Day celebrations on the Padang suggest both the success of the efforts to invest them with symbolic meaning during the colonial era, and the possibility that continuity has been as at least as much of a theme in the first two centuries of the history of modern Singapore as has been the theme of change.

### **Architectural Images of Imperial Tradition**

All of the grand buildings which stood along St. Andrew's Road at different times in the colonial era contributed to the backdrop of the royal celebrations and other activities which took place on the Padang. Moreover, by the late nineteenth century, the Singapore Cricket Club and the Singapore Recreation Club had established their clubhouses at each end of the Padang. These buildings were the scenery or settings which framed the stage for the royal and imperial celebrations, which constituted the most spectacular rituals of the local theatre of prestige – the grand public events in which local Asian and European elites participated as performers and stage managers, while the

---

<sup>101</sup> O.W. Gilmour, *With Freedom to Singapore*, pp. 105-109.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

masses took part as the audience. The monumental civic buildings and prestigious clubhouses framed the Padang on three sides, much as the semicircular ornamental colonnade framed the Raffles Statue from 1919 until the Japanese demolished it after their conquest of Singapore in 1942.<sup>102</sup>

The repeated neoclassical themes in the architectural backdrop of the Padang stressed nostalgia for ancient Roman imperial grandeur, although there was also an element reminiscent of rural England: St. Andrew's Cathedral, which was built by Indian convicts and completed in 1862,<sup>103</sup> evoked the medieval gothic tradition. This Cathedral was reportedly designed in the style of Netley Abbey in Hampshire.<sup>104</sup> George Peet recalled that, during his early years in Singapore in the 1920s, the Cathedral's façade was grey and weathered, and reminded him of a country church in his native England.<sup>105</sup> Another exception to the overall neoclassical architectural style of the civic district was what might be described as a neo-Egyptian obelisk placed near the river, in honour of the visit in 1850 of Lord Dalhousie, the Governor-General of India. The commemoration of Lord Dalhousie's visit was the occasion for prominent Asians and Europeans to form a committee to make the arrangements for building the monument, which included inscriptions in several languages. The members of this committee included Ang Choon Seng, Joaquim d'Almeida, J. Guthrie, Seah Eu Chin, and Tan Kim Seng, among others.

---

<sup>102</sup> For descriptions of the colonnade, see the *Straits Times*, 7 February 1919, p. 10, NUS microfilm reel R0016569, and: Ambrose Pratt, *Magical Malaya* (1931), p. 25. Regarding its destruction, see: O.W. Gilmour, *With Freedom to Singapore*, p. 113.

<sup>103</sup> Regarding St. Andrew's Cathedral, see: Major J.F.A. McNair, *Prisoners Their Own Warders* (1899), p. 97; John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India* (1865), p. 69; Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*, pp. 371-372; and: John Bastin, *Travellers' Singapore: An Anthology*, p. 85.

<sup>104</sup> See: Major J.F.A. McNair, *Prisoners Their Own Warders* (1899), pp. 72-74 and 97-100; John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India* (1865), p. 69; and: John Bastin, *Travellers' Singapore: An Anthology*, p. 85.

<sup>105</sup> George Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, p. 66.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

Even today, visitors to Empress Place may stop to read the inscription in praise of the free trade policy, which was sacred to Asian and Western merchants alike.<sup>106</sup>

With the exception of St. Andrew's Cathedral, the monumental civic buildings around the Padang tended to evoke classical imperial imagery, reminiscent of imperial Rome. The early mansions which faced the Padang from across St. Andrew's Road and their successors – the Europe Hotel, the Municipal Building, and the domed Supreme Court building, all featured stately porticos with grand colonnades, which some of the participants in the royal celebrations may have compared with their images of the Roman Forum – images which they may have gleaned from reading historical accounts and other literary works, by watching stage productions of *Julius Caesar*, or even by visiting Roman ruins; after all, Italy was a popular destination for British tourists in the nineteenth century. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some British historians admired the Roman Empire, claiming that it performed a civilising mission.<sup>107</sup> Some Britons compared their Empire with the Roman Empire, and looked to Roman history for inspiration, as well as for instructive examples in imperial rule; it was only natural, therefore, for them to be attracted to the grandeur of classical architectural styles, which could be used to connect their Empire in some sense with its Roman predecessor, the greatest Western empire of ancient times.<sup>108</sup>

---

<sup>106</sup> C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, pp. 530-532.

<sup>107</sup> See: W.F. Monypenny, "The Imperial Ideal," in: *The Empire and the Century: A Series of Essays on Imperial Problems and Possibilities by Various Writers* (1905), p. 7, and the quotations in: Raymond Betts, "The Allusion to Rome in British Imperialist Thought of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *Victorian Studies*, Volume XV, Number 2 (December 1971), pp. 150-151.

<sup>108</sup> See: Raymond Betts, "The Allusion to Rome in British Imperialist Thought of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *Victorian Studies*, Volume XV, Number 2 (December 1971), pp. 149-159; and: Swati Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism and the Colonial Uncanny*, pp. 29 and 48. I am grateful to A/P Tan Tai Yong for bringing Chattopadhyay's book to my attention. Regarding the use of examples of Roman imperialism by a British imperialist, see the words of Lord Grey, quoted in: D.A. Low, *Lion Rampant: Essays in the Study of British Imperialism*, p. 23.

### *Scenes of Prestige*

Perhaps there was a sense that, if the British Empire could follow Roman examples and principles, and adopt Roman imagery, then maybe the British Empire could last at least as many centuries as the Roman Empire. Seemingly timeless neoclassical architecture implied an Empire in which Asian and European elites alike could hope that the sun would never set, and their prestige and status would be sustained only throughout their own lifetimes, but beyond them and down through the generations of their descendants. It is noteworthy that the neoclassical idiom was employed across time in all of the public buildings in Singapore's civic centre – the Maxwell House completed in 1827 and subsequently enlarged and embellished as a Court House, the Town Hall and the Government Offices in the 1860s, Victoria Memorial Hall in 1905, the Municipal Building in 1929, and the domed Supreme Court building in 1939. These public buildings belonged to both Asian and European elites: the Victoria Memorial Hall was a prestigious venue where elites of different races gathered for public civic rituals and entertainments, where they expressed their loyalty to their Crown and their Empire and asserted their elite status, while the multiracial memberships of the Legislative Council and the Municipal Commission held their meetings in the grand settings of the Government Offices and the Municipal Building respectively.

The opening of the majestic neoclassical Supreme Court building in 1939 was celebrated with a grand ceremony, featured a royal salute by a Police Guard, a Police band playing *God Save the King*, and speeches by Governor Sir Shenton Thomas, Sir Ong Siang Song, and Attorney-General C.G. Howell. Speaking in his capacity as the Senior Member of the Colony's Bar, Sir Ong Siang spoke on behalf of all of the Colony's advocates and solicitors, expressing their loyalty and devotion to King George VI. He

noted that the size and beauty of the new Supreme Court building was appropriate to the importance and dignity of the institution it housed, and he reminded his audience that he and his colleagues, as officers of the King's Courts, played a key role in ensuring that *all* of the *cosmopolitan* people of this Colony enjoyed the benefit of the King's Justice. Sir Ong Siang's address clearly asserted the inclusion and partnership of the members of his profession in the colonial justice system as an institution, and thereby implied that the splendid new Supreme Court building belonged as much to the Colony's Asian legal elites as it did to their Western colleagues. Sir Ong Siang's speech – and the fact that he was cast in such a prominent role in this ceremony – was public representation of the colonial social structure and the multiracial nature of the elite class.<sup>109</sup>

Imagery reminiscent of the Roman Empire was associated with imperial grandeur and tradition, and with aspirations toward strength and permanence, not only in Britain and its Empire, but in other modern nation-states as well. National capital cities in Europe and America were built or re-built in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to evoke awe-inspiring images of ancient Rome, and to encourage their peoples to believe in the strength, permanence, and prestige of their states, giving them a reason to feel a sense of belonging and loyalty, while bringing the population together in a spirit of unity.<sup>110</sup> While such sentiments might be most closely identified with nationalistic pride, they could also apply to imperial and colonial situations, as indicated by the apparent enthusiasm with which royal events were celebrated by people in Singapore and other

---

<sup>109</sup> Booklet entitled: *Ceremonial Opening of the New Supreme Court Building Singapore by His Excellency Sir Shenton Thomas G.C.M.G., O.B.E. Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1939*. Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1939. I am grateful to Ten Leu-Jiun for kindly bringing this booklet to my attention.

<sup>110</sup> See: David Cannadine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition', c. 1820-1977," in: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, editors, *The Invention of Tradition*, pp. 146-147; and: Kim Dovey, *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form*, especially Chapter 5, pp. 55-70.



colonial settings. It should be no surprise if historical records show that those Asian elites who were such significant stakeholders in the colonial system were also some of the most enthusiastic participants in imperial pageantry.

Monumental civic architecture and public spaces, by appearing timeless and traditional, may help to convince people that the prevailing social and political structures associated with these built forms are also timeless and traditional; indeed, that the social and political *status quo* is *natural*, and that it should be taken for granted, rather than questioned or challenged.<sup>111</sup> The elites symbolically claimed their right to authority and prestige, and claimed the landscape as their own, by visually framing the Padang with a backdrop of monumental structures, and reserving this space in the heart of the city as a ceremonial stage for the performances of their theatre of prestige, in which the only role of the general population was in the audience. The fact that certain people, who held functional positions in certain institutions, were able to coordinate the clearing of spaces, the construction of buildings and monuments, and the performance of spectacular public rituals, clearly demonstrated their authority and made their elite status socially real.<sup>112</sup>

In addition to speaking to the general public, the setting of the theatre of prestige also spoke to the elites themselves, the actors on the stage, even as they enacted their performances. The grandeur of the settings attracted elites and pulled them together, much as any grand theatre could attract ambitious stage actors who want to see their names in lights. Each succeeding generation of elites reaffirmed their rank in the social and political structure and their shared status as elites, by cooperatively participating in

---

<sup>111</sup> See: Kim Dovey, *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form*, pp. 2 and 11-12.

<sup>112</sup> See: Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*, p. 120; and: Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power," *Sociological Theory*, Volume 7, Number 1 (Spring 1989), pp. 20-21.

### *Scenes of Prestige*

the organisation and performance of public rituals in this theatre of prestige, associating with one another and enjoying the publicity that was given to their activities. If the legitimacy of a social and political order could be made to enjoy popular acceptance as if it were natural, then it would be no more susceptible to be questioned or challenged than any force or characteristic of the natural world – for example, who would think to question the *correctness* of gravity, or the rising and setting of the sun? It is to be expected that all social and political elites everywhere would aspire to achieve such a degree of popularly-perceived naturalness and legitimacy for their prestige and authority, to the point of putting their position in society beyond question, as a taken-for-granted fact of life. Such a powerful visual argument – an assertion of status and prestige through architecture and space – could only be expected to attract ambitious elites and would-be elites, whose craving for reputation and publicity would cause them to be pulled into the theatre of prestige as steel is attracted to a powerful magnet.

#### **Monumental Architecture and the Reproduction of the Elite Class**

By creating a grand and awe-inspiring stage of monumental buildings and spaces where public rituals could be enacted, the designers and builders of these artefacts thereby invested these sites with prestige, and pooled resources into a built form of symbolic capital which was impossible for anyone in Singapore to ignore – and in which many people may have felt honoured and privileged to take part in spectacular public celebrations of Empire. By participating in the theatre of prestige, people – and especially elites – could feel that they were part of the Empire that was represented by the grand architecture and spaces, and by the huge crowds of thousands of onlookers who

### *Scenes of Prestige*

thronged the streets during the imperial celebrations. The distinction of these events and the honour they conferred on their organisers and protagonists was enhanced by the size of the crowds of spectators, who were attracted to watch these rituals by the interesting parades and the monumental scenery. By taking part in these events, elites could, perhaps, feel that these rituals – and the Empire itself – belonged to them in some sense.

Individuals were likely attracted to take part in imperial celebrations (whether as participants or as spectators) by their inherent grandeur and prestige, buttressed by their monumental settings, and, by assembling in the theatre of prestige, they were brought into closer social proximity with one another, especially the leading Asian and European elites who took part together in arranging and performing such rituals. These buildings and spaces gave the Settlement a physical or material centre to correspond with the social centre that was comprised of the Asian and European elites and the institutions which they created and led; in other words, a physical structure to parallel and represent (and to help create) the social structure of the colonial society. Physical structures could help give social reality to the structures of society, and especially to the location of elites at its summit; the fact that elites could play prominent roles on this ceremonial stage implied that they had the right to play these roles, that they deserved social honour, and that their institutions and rituals were inherently distinctive and important. The existence and use of this physical centre was a powerful support for the magnetic social mechanism of prestige, which attracted and held Asian and European elites together in a multiracial community of status at the centre of this colonial society.

The social function of the monumental architecture and ceremonial stage of the civic centre was not merely a matter of elites creating built imagery to impress the

### *Scenes of Prestige*

masses; it was, perhaps even more importantly, about elites shaping a built environment that impressed fellow elites and aspiring elites, in the present as well as in the future. One of the rewards offered to the elites who participated in the central institutions and rituals of the colonial society was the privilege of gaining some sense of connection with, or ownership of, the monumental architectural symbols of the colonial system, by enjoying access to the meeting rooms of the Municipal Commission and the Legislative Council, and by being granted the privilege of marching and playing sports on the Padang together with fellow elites. Having invested the built symbols of the civic centre with great symbolic value, the elites then enjoyed the prestige of these monumental status symbols by associating themselves with them. Insofar as the dignity of these built symbols enhanced the social prestige and personal egos of the elites who associated with one another in these venues, to that degree did this built environment foster the continued cultivation of social connections and exchanges of symbolic capital among these elites. By providing an additional encouragement for elites – and those who would be elites – to take part in the theatre of prestige, the monumental stage of this theatre promoted the recruitment of new elite personnel and the renewal and reproduction of this class across time.

The neoclassical architecture of the public buildings contributed a sense of heritage and tradition to the institutionalised patterns of cooperation which prevailed among the elite actors in the theatre of prestige, at the centre of the colonial society. By remaining as prominent fixtures in the cityscape over time, these buildings gained additional symbolic power, as they acquired the aura and authority of association with the past, the sacredness of tradition that people refer to when they describe something as

*time-honoured*.<sup>113</sup> These imposing buildings contributed to the creation of new traditions of authority and prestige by providing monumental status symbols to which generations of elites could associate themselves. The symbolic value of the civic centre and its ability to contribute to the reproduction of the elite class increased steadily over time, not only because new neoclassical buildings were added to this locality over the years, but also simply because the buildings themselves became older and acquired deeper layers of associations with local social memories and traditions. The tendency of the symbolic strength of the setting to grow over time was another self-reinforcing and self-perpetuating aspect of the social mechanism which integrated and reproduced the cosmopolitan elite class.

### **Historical Development of the Civic Centre**

The social function of the civic centre over time as the premier scene of the theatre of prestige was characterised at least as much by the theme of continuity in terms of its ceremonial role, as by the theme of change in terms of the advent of increasingly monumental buildings and increasingly elaborate ceremonies. Since the early decades of the Settlement, monumental buildings imparted an element of grandeur to the Padang, echoing (if only faintly and on a much smaller scale) the grandeur of ancient Rome and the Roman-inspired neoclassical Western capital cities of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – for example, London’s Trafalgar Square. The scale of the grandeur of this backdrop grew steadily over time, in terms of the size and number of structures around the Padang. The whole scene reached the fullest stage of its

---

<sup>113</sup> See: Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, p. 29; and: Edward Shils, “Tradition,” in: Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*, pp. 186-199.

### *Scenes of Prestige*

architectural development in 1939, just in time for it to be conquered by the Japanese in 1942. Today, the historic civic centre still looks much as it did then.

Yet the history of this locality is not just a story of change and increasing elaboration, at least not if that history is understood to include the record of its social function, as well of its physical development over time. The continuity of the use of this site as the scene for the staging of performances of the colonial theatre of prestige actually extends even beyond the history of its architectural backdrop. While the buildings grew in size, the assemblies grew in numbers, and the rituals grew in splendour and grandeur, the social and political functions of these events maintained a fair degree of stability through the years.

The first ceremonial performance enacted here by a multiracial cast of elites for a diverse audience took place on this spot before any of the monumental buildings had begun to take shape. The use of this area as the ceremonial centre of the Settlement began on the 6<sup>th</sup> of February, 1819, when the ceremonial signing and sealing of a treaty between Sultan Hussein, Temenggong Abdul Rahman, and Lieutenant-Governor Sir Stamford Raffles, the treaty which officially established the Settlement of Singapore, took place in a tent located in the area that later become Empress Place. The tent was pitched at or beyond the southern end of the Padang, near the Singapore River, probably not far from where the statue of Raffles now stands in front of Victoria Memorial Hall. Chinese and Malay spectators surrounded the tent during the ceremony, while Indian soldiers lined a red carpet leading to the tent from the Sultan's residence.<sup>114</sup> This public

---

<sup>114</sup> J. Crawford, *A Diary kept on Board the Honourable Company's Surveying Ship INVESTIGATOR by J. Crawford, her Commander*, entry for 6 February 1819, pp. 104-106. This typescript is in the NUS Central Library Singapore-Malaysia Collection, DS 592 Cra.

ceremony – a rather grand one at that, considering the primitive state of the Settlement at that time – was to be the first of many staged within this locality.

The Padang itself is the most continuous feature of the urban centre of Singapore, the only space which has not been built on or paved over. The relatively undeveloped nature of the Padang suggests that it may prove to be an archaeological goldmine someday. Sites near the Padang, including the Empress Place area, were inhabited centuries before the establishment of the Settlement. An archaeological excavation in Empress Place in 1998 unearthed a trove of artefacts, estimated to number no less than forty thousand items, which were found in two layers, one dating from the later years of the thirteenth century to the middle of the fifteenth century, and the other from the late eighteenth century.<sup>115</sup> Local residents may have used the Padang for their own purposes long before any Westerners arrived here. The Padang was certainly already in existence when the Settlement was founded. We can get a sense of the appearance of the Padang when Raffles first set foot on the island by reading a first-hand description of the area as seen by a visiting ship's captain and recorded in his diary, in an entry dated 4<sup>th</sup> February 1819. According to this description, the Padang was at the time a level field, partially clear of overgrowth, where tents were pitched prior to the founding ceremony.<sup>116</sup> This grassy field in the civic district of Singapore was located within the area which Sir Stamford Raffles reserved for the use of the government in 1822.<sup>117</sup>

---

<sup>115</sup> John N. Miksic, "14<sup>th</sup>-Century Singapore: A Port of Trade," in: John N. Miksic and Cheryl-Ann Low Mei Gek, eds., *Early Singapore 1300s – 1819: Evidence in Maps, Text and Artefacts*, pp. 47 and 51.

<sup>116</sup> J. Crawford, *A Diary kept on Board the Honourable Company's Surveying Ship INVESTIGATOR by J. Crawford, her Commander*, entry for 6 February 1819, p. 97. This typescript is in the NUS Central Library Singapore-Malaysia Collection, DS 592 Cra.

<sup>117</sup> See the instructions written by Sir Stamford Raffles, dated 4 November 1822, quoted in: C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 82.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

The area where the treaty-signing ceremony was held in 1819 – the area between the Padang and the Singapore River – became the heart of the civic centre of colonial Singapore, the local equivalent of the Roman Forum, or of the City of Westminster in London. The construction of the colonial civic centre began with the pitching of the tent for the treaty-signing ceremony in 1819, near Sultan Hussein's residence, which is mentioned in a firsthand account.<sup>118</sup> Perhaps the Sultan's residence was near the home of Temenggong Abdul Rahman, in the area which became the site of Singapore's first Parliament House<sup>119</sup> – or perhaps the Sultan was staying with the Temenggong, before his own house had been built. Raffles left Singapore once the treaty was signed, having entrusted the administration of the Settlement to Major William Farquhar, the first Resident and Commandant, who built his Residency House on the site which would later be the location of the Europe Hotel and, after that, the Supreme Court building which was opened in 1939.<sup>120</sup> Farquhar's Residency House was the scene of a memorable meeting in 1823, attended by the Sultan, the Temenggong, and their officials, together with the local Europeans, when Raffles convened an assembly there to announce his plans for the Singapore Institution.<sup>121</sup> Over time, this locality became the site of important public buildings, including the offices of the colonial and municipal bureaucracies, and the meeting places of the Municipal Commission and the Legislative Council. In 1907, this

---

<sup>118</sup> J. Crawford, *A Diary kept on Board the Honourable Company's Surveying Ship INVESTIGATOR* by J. Crawford, her Commander, entry for 6 February 1819, pp. 104-106. This typescript is in the NUS Central Library Singapore-Malaysia Collection, DS 592 Cra.

<sup>119</sup> See: C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>120</sup> Leong Foke Meng, "Early Land Transactions in Singapore: The Real Estates of William Farquhar (1774-1839), John Crawford (1783-1868), and Their Families," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume LXXVII, Part 1 (June 2004), p. 26.

<sup>121</sup> Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, *The Hikayat Abdullah*, translated by A.H. Hill, pp. 180-181; Lady Raffles, *Memoir* (1830), Appendix p. 74.



area was named Empress Place,<sup>122</sup> in honour of the late Queen Victoria, who was also the Empress of India.

One of the most important of the public buildings of Empress Place started out as an imposing mansion built for a merchant named John Argyle Maxwell, which was completed in 1827. The government subsequently rented this house for use as public offices and a courthouse,<sup>123</sup> and finally bought it in 1841.<sup>124</sup> The authorities gradually expanded this building over the years, and used it for a variety of public purposes. It served as the Supreme Court building from 1875 to 1939,<sup>125</sup> and as the home of the Singapore Legislative Assembly from 1954 to 1965, before becoming Singapore's first Parliament House in 1965.<sup>126</sup>

Another important building in Empress Place was originally constructed in the 1860s, and subsequently enlarged. This building was known as the Government Offices during the colonial era, and is now the Asian Civilisations Museum. This building contained many colonial government offices, as well as the Legislative Council chamber, where the Legislative Councillors (including some of the most prominent Asian and European elites) held their meetings, while the image of the Queen-Empress watched over them from a portrait on the wall.<sup>127</sup> This Council Chamber was also available for other meetings among the multiracial elite social class; for example, the committee that was responsible for organising the local celebrations of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 deliberated in the Legislative Council Chamber; this committee included

---

<sup>122</sup> Victor R. Savage and Brenda S.A. Yeoh, *Toponymics: A Study of Singapore Street Names* (Second Edition, 2004), p. 119.

<sup>123</sup> Edwin Lee, *Historic Buildings of Singapore*, p. 35.

<sup>124</sup> C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 341.

<sup>125</sup> Edwin Lee, *Historic Buildings of Singapore*, pp. 35 and 37.

<sup>126</sup> Edwin Lee, *Historic Buildings of Singapore*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>127</sup> Edwin Lee, *Historic Buildings of Singapore*, p. 38, and: Rev. G.M. Reith, *Handbook to Singapore with Map*, Second Edition, Revised by Walter Makepeace (1907), and republished in 1985, p. 57.

Tan Jiak Kim and Abdul Kadir, as well as a member of the Tessensohn family (a distinguished Eurasian family) and several prominent Europeans.<sup>128</sup>

Perhaps the most visually outstanding building in the Empress Place locality is the Victoria Memorial Hall, an ornate building in the Edwardian baroque variety of neoclassical architecture, featuring two stately porticos flanking a central domed clock tower.<sup>129</sup> This building began its life as the Town Hall, a building in the Second Empire architectural style that was fashionable during the reign of the French Emperor Napoleon III (from 1853 to 1870).<sup>130</sup> The Second Empire Style was particularly appropriate for this building, which Asian and European elites used from time to express their loyalty to their Empire and their Crown. Governor Butterworth dedicated the foundation stone of the Town Hall in 1855,<sup>131</sup> and it was inaugurated with a public ball in 1862.<sup>132</sup> It was here that Asians and Europeans attended the ceremony inaugurating the Crown Colony of the Straits Settlements in 1867,<sup>133</sup> and that Tan Kim Ching read an address on behalf the Chinese community to Prince Alfred, the Duke of Edinburgh, in 1869.<sup>134</sup> The Town Hall was also the venue for the two ceremonies in 1876, in which Governor Sir William Jervois publicly invested the Honourable Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa as a Companion of the Order of St. Michael and St. George (or CMG), and Maharajah Abu Bakar of Johore as a Knight Grand Cross of the Order of St. Michael and St. George (or GCMG).<sup>135</sup> The

---

<sup>128</sup> *Straits Times*, 12 June 1897, p. 2, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016457.

<sup>129</sup> Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House*, p. 124; Edwin Lee, *Historic Buildings of Singapore*, p. 43.

<sup>130</sup> See the picture of the Town Hall as it looked in 1887, in: Edwin Lee, *Historic Buildings*, p. ii.

<sup>131</sup> C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, pp. 612-613.

<sup>132</sup> Mrs. G.P. Owen, "A Mid-Century Diary," In: Makepeace et al., *One Hundred Years*, Vol. Two, p. 557.

<sup>133</sup> C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, pp. 786-787.

<sup>134</sup> *Straits Times*, 4 December 1869, p. 1, NUS microfilm reel R0016422.

<sup>135</sup> *Straits Times*, 13 May 1876, p. 2, and 26 August 1876, p. 1, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016425.

Town Hall was the venue for a social function in honour of the wedding of Tan Jiak Kim on 27 December 1878.<sup>136</sup>

The Town Hall housed the Singapore Municipal Offices until 1893.<sup>137</sup> The Singapore Municipality included both Asian and Western Municipal Commissioners, apparently beginning with the wealthy businessman and Justice of the Peace Tan Kim Seng (the grandfather of Tan Jiak Kim), who was a Singapore Municipal Commissioner in 1856 and 1857.<sup>138</sup> The Town Hall provided a suitably dignified venue for the social interactions of Asian and European Municipal Commissioners, in a building in the palatial Second Empire style.

The work of expanding and transforming the Town Hall into the even more palatial and ornate Victoria Memorial Hall began in 1902, and the project was finished in 1905.<sup>139</sup> Its name commemorates the memory of Queen Victoria, the Queen-Empress, who died in 1901. This building in the Edwardian baroque style<sup>140</sup> was the venue for various ceremonies which were attended by Asian and European elites throughout the colonial era. Asians and Europeans alike used this building as a symbol to assert their location in the centre of the society and their leadership of the community. For example, leading Asian elites participated in the ceremonial re-dedication of the statue of Sir

---

<sup>136</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 193-194, quoting the *Singapore Daily Times*.

<sup>137</sup> The Municipal Offices moved from the Town Hall to Finlayson Green in 1893, and in 1900 they moved into the old mansions of Dr. William Montgomerie and Resident Councillor Thomas Church (the former Masonic Lodge), on the site which is now occupied by City Hall (the former Municipal Building). See: F.J. Hallifax, "Municipal Government," in: Makepeace et al., eds., *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume One, p. 335; and: C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 376.

<sup>138</sup> Tan Kim Seng was listed as a Municipal Commissioner in a report on a meeting of the Municipal Commissioners held on 29<sup>th</sup> December 1856, published in the *Singapore Free Press*, 1 January 1857, p. 3, R0006022. Regarding Tan Kim Seng and the Municipal Commission, see also: *Singapore Free Press*, 15 January 1857, supplement p. 1, R0006022; *Singapore Free Press*, 1 October 1857, p. 4, R0006022; *Singapore Free Press*, 22 October 1857, p. 4, R0006022.

<sup>139</sup> F.J. Hallifax, "Municipal Government," in Makepeace et al., Volume One, p. 334.

<sup>140</sup> Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*, p. 124.

Stamford Raffles in front of the Victoria Memorial Hall, where it was moved from the Padang in honour of the centenary of the founding of the Settlement in 1919.<sup>141</sup> In 1954, near the end of the colonial era, the Victoria Memorial Hall served as the venue for the inaugural meeting of the People's Action Party.<sup>142</sup>

### **The Padang – Centre Stage of the Theatre of Prestige**

The Padang was the central stage of the theatre of prestige in colonial Singapore, and the social and symbolic function of this ceremonial site demonstrated a great degree of continuity throughout the colonial era in fostering the social reality of the summit and centre of this Settlement's multiracial society. While the Padang might be regarded as the most imperial locality in colonial Singapore,<sup>143</sup> this did not mean that it belonged only to Westerners. In fact, it belonged to at least some of the Asian population as well, and especially to the Asian elites who took a prominent part in the ritual pageantry on the Padang by marching in parades during imperial celebrations. These Asians thereby publicly asserted their standing in the colonial social structure, their stakeholdership in the Empire, and their membership in the elite class, along with their Western fellow elites.

The treaty ceremony in 1819 was the first in a long series of public rituals and social functions held on or around the Padang by the Asians and Europeans of colonial Singapore, orchestrated by Asian and European elites. In October 1826, some local

---

<sup>141</sup> *Singapore Free Press*, 6 February 1919, p. 4, NUS Central Library microfilm R0006130.

<sup>142</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew*, pp. 179-181.

<sup>143</sup> See: Ananda Rajah, "Making and Managing Tradition in Singapore: The National Day Parade," in: *Our Place in Time: Exploring Heritage and Memory in Singapore*, p. 101.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

Europeans arranged a farewell party on the Padang for Mrs. Crawford (the wife of Resident John Crawford) who was about to leave Singapore for Bengal. This social function took place in a temporary building, which was set up on the Padang. The report on this event in the *Singapore Chronicle* described the splendid style of this building, featuring arches and colonnades decorated with flags, plants, and flowers. There was also a dancing hall, where the guests were entertained by a Javanese band.<sup>144</sup> We can imagine how such an event would have led the guests to think of the Padang as a place of celebration, and thus promote the development of a local tradition of using this space for celebratory activities. The European merchants who lived in the area near the Padang<sup>145</sup> apparently developed an attachment to this place and the open view of the sea which it provided early on in the history of the Settlement, even before Governor Fullerton left the Straits in 1830. Governor Fullerton wanted to divide the Padang into building lots and sell them off for development, but the merchants successfully protested against this decision, and thus saved the Padang for future generations.<sup>146</sup>

The use of the Padang for military parades and sporting activities became traditional by the early decades of the history of the Settlement.<sup>147</sup> The Padang embodied a range of meanings that were expressed in the use of this space for activities that were enacted in public view, and in the placement of monumental structures around its periphery; these meanings might be classified as jubilant, solemn, and sporting. The

---

<sup>144</sup> *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British India and its Dependencies*, Volume XXIII, Number 137, May 1827, p. 682, quoting the *Singapore Chronicle* of 9 November 1826.

<sup>145</sup> C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 376.

<sup>146</sup> C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 76; John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions* (1865), pp. 19-20; Capt. H.F. Pearson, "Singapore from the Sea, June 1823. Notes on a Recently Discovered Sketch attributed to Lt. Phillip Jackson," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume 26, Part I, July 1953, p. 55.

<sup>147</sup> See, for example: C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, pp. 75-76, 314, 647, 665, and 682. See also the description of a military parade on the Padang in: *Singapore Free Press*, 19 February 1857, p. 3, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0006022.

jubilant function of the Padang included the celebration organised by Asian and European elites in honour of the military victory at Pretoria in 1900,<sup>148</sup> the public proclamation of the armistice at the end of World War One in 1918,<sup>149</sup> and the announcement of the formal acceptance of the Japanese surrender in 1945 by Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten in front of the Municipal Building.<sup>150</sup> In addition, there were the imperial celebrations which attracted the attention and participation of many Asians, including the annual royal birthday celebrations, the Jubilee celebrations in 1887,<sup>151</sup> 1897,<sup>152</sup> and 1935,<sup>153</sup> and the Coronation celebrations in 1911<sup>154</sup> and 1937.<sup>155</sup>

The solemn aspect of the Padang was underscored by the Cenotaph, a memorial in honour of soldiers who died in World War One on the seaward side of the Padang. Governor Sir Laurence Guillemard dedicated the foundation stone of the Cenotaph on 15 November 1920, in a ceremony witnessed by Georges Clemenceau, the former French Premier.<sup>156</sup> Prince Edward, the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VIII) unveiled the completed Cenotaph during his visit to Singapore in 1922.<sup>157</sup> The Cenotaph was joined in 1925 by the Tan Kim Seng Fountain, which was moved there from Fullerton Square.<sup>158</sup> This ornate fountain was unveiled at its original site on 19 May 1882 by Municipal Commission President Thomas Scott in memory of the late Tan Kim Seng,<sup>159</sup>

---

<sup>148</sup> *Straits Times*, 5 June 1900, p. 3, and 7 June 1900, p. 2, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016463.

<sup>149</sup> *Malaya Tribune*, 18 November 1918, p. 4, R0005814, and: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 557.

<sup>150</sup> O.W. Gilmour, *With Freedom to Singapore*, pp. 105, 109; Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story*, p. 84.

<sup>151</sup> *Straits Times* (weekly issue), 29 June 1887, p. 1, R0011435.

<sup>152</sup> *Straits Times*, 22 June 1897, p. 3, R0016457.

<sup>153</sup> *Straits Times*, 6 May 1935, p. 11.

<sup>154</sup> *Straits Times*, 22 June 1911, p. 12, and 23 June 1911, p. 7, R0016518.

<sup>155</sup> *Malaya Tribune*, 13 May 1937, p. 15, R0005944; *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 15 May 1937 (morning edition), p. 7, ZR05586.

<sup>156</sup> Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*, p. 374.

<sup>157</sup> *Singapore Free Press*, 1 April 1922, p. 7, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0006149.

<sup>158</sup> Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*, p. 374.

<sup>159</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 209.

a wealthy businessman, property owner, Municipal Commissioner,<sup>160</sup> and Justice of the Peace,<sup>161</sup> who died in 1864. Tan Kim Seng's descendants were prominent in Singapore society for several generations. The relocation of this memorial fountain to a location adjacent to the Padang and near the Cenotaph in 1925 emphasised that the Padang belonged to Asians, or at least to Asian elites, as much as it belonged to Europeans. Moreover, the relocation of the Tan Kim Seng fountain also connected the memory of this Chinese elite with royalty, since the street on the fountain's side of the Padang (that is, the seaward side) was named Connaught Drive, in honour of the visit of Prince Arthur and Princess Louise, the Duke and Duchess of Connaught, in 1890; Prince Arthur was Queen Victoria's third son.<sup>162</sup>

The symbolic value of this area as a site for memorial monuments was evidently appreciated by Indians and Chinese. During the Japanese Occupation of Singapore, a monument to the Indian National Army was placed near the Cenotaph, but it was destroyed soon after the British resumed control of Singapore in 1945.<sup>163</sup> An official with the Japanese occupation authorities stated that Gurkha soldiers carried out the demolition of the Indian National Army monument.<sup>164</sup> Following its destruction, a group of Indians put a wreath on the spot where this monument once stood.<sup>165</sup> In 1954, a monument to Lim Bo Seng, a Chinese Malayan hero of World War Two who was killed

---

<sup>160</sup> Tan Kim Seng was listed as a Municipal Commissioner in a report on a meeting of the Municipal Commissioners held on 29<sup>th</sup> December 1856, published in the *Singapore Free Press*, 1 January 1857, p. 3, R0006022. Regarding Tan Kim Seng and the Municipal Commission, see also: *Singapore Free Press*, 15 January 1857, supplement p. 1, R0006022; *Singapore Free Press*, 1 October 1857, p. 4, R0006022; *Singapore Free Press*, 22 October 1857, p. 4, R0006022.

<sup>161</sup> Tan Kim Seng was made a Justice of the Peace in 1850 on the death of Tan Tock Seng, according to Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 46. Tan Kim Seng was listed as a JP in the 1858 edition of *The Singapore Almanack & Directory* (NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0011768), p. 31.

<sup>162</sup> Dato Sir Roland Braddell, "The Good Old Days," in: Makepeace *et al.*, eds., Volume Two, p. 523.

<sup>163</sup> O.W. Gilmour, *With Freedom to Singapore*, p. 113.

<sup>164</sup> Mamoru Shinozaki, *Syonan – My Story: The Japanese Occupation of Singapore*, pp. 67 and 97.

<sup>165</sup> O.W. Gilmour, *With Freedom to Singapore*, p. 142.

by the Japanese in 1944, was unveiled near the Cenotaph and the Tan Kim Seng Fountain.<sup>166</sup> Thus, as the so-called *European* colonial era in Singapore came to a close in 1959, there were only two monuments to individuals at the Padang, and both of these monuments commemorated prominent *Asians*: Tan Kim Seng and Lim Bo Seng.

The tradition of using the Padang as a ceremonial stage survived several political changes over the years, and even the end of the colonial system itself. The Japanese, who occupied Singapore from 1942 to 1945, seem to have appreciated the dignity of the Padang and its usefulness as a ceremonial stage, evidently regarding it as suitable even for a ritual in honour of their Emperor. The celebration of the birthday of Emperor Hirohito in April 1942 was the occasion for students from local schools (then under Japanese control) to parade at the Padang, and for them to be reviewed by Lieutenant-General Yamashita Tomoyuki, who commanded the Japanese conquest of Malaya and Singapore.<sup>167</sup> In July 1943, the Padang served as the venue for the review of fifteen thousand soldiers of the Indian National Army by Japanese Prime Minister General Tojo Hideki and Subhas Chandra Bose, an Indian nationalist leader who was befriended by the Japanese.<sup>168</sup>

Following the defeat of Japan in 1945, the Padang returned to its pre-war functions. Singapore achieved independence as a Republic in 1965, and the Padang

---

<sup>166</sup> Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*, p. 375. See also: S. Ramachandra, *Singapore Landmarks Past and Present*, pp. 38-42, and the collection of newspaper articles about Lim Bo Seng and his monument, which is the sixth item on NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0030259.

<sup>167</sup> C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*, p. 197; Mamoru Shinozaki, *Syonan – My Story: The Japanese Occupation of Singapore*, pp. 40-44.

<sup>168</sup> Malcolm H. Murfett, "Living under the Rising Sun: Singapore and the Japanese Occupation 1942-1945," in: Malcolm H. Murfett, John N. Miksic, Brian P. Farrell, and Chiang Ming Shun, *Between Two Oceans: A Military History of Singapore From First Settlement to Final British Withdrawal*, p. 270. See also: Mamoru Shinozaki, *Syonan – My Story: The Japanese Occupation of Singapore*, pp. 63-67.



became a site of National Day Parades.<sup>169</sup> The continuity of the use of the Padang in the colonial era, under the Japanese occupation, and on into the era of the Republic of Singapore, suggests that the elites of the colonial era were very successful in their efforts to invest the Padang with symbolic significance, not only for themselves, but in the minds of the general population as well.

The solemn and jubilant functions of the Padang during the colonial era might be grouped together under one heading, as *imperial* events; indeed, imperial events likely often combined solemn and jubilant aspects. Seeing the Padang in this way, and dividing its social functions into those which were officially imperial, *versus* those which were not imperial (at least not officially), we can see the Padang as a space which combined two roles in one location – namely, its role as a venue for the playful activities of sports and recreation, together with its other role as a venue for the regimented activities of solemn and jubilant imperial celebrations. Both of these roles attracted Asians and Europeans alike, as spectators and as participants. These activities brought different sections of the diverse population together in non-economic interactions, which clearly defies the Furnivallian conception of a plural colonial society, and supports instead a new understanding of this concept, in which it is recognised that a society can be plural and yet be characterised by social and symbolic interactions, as well as economic interactions, between people of different sections of the diverse population.

---

<sup>169</sup> Ananda Rajah, “Making and Managing Tradition in Singapore: The National Day Parade,” in: *Our Place in Time: Exploring Heritage and Memory in Singapore*, p. 102.

### **Sporting Events on the Padang**

The Padang was publicly identified with sporting events involving Asians and Europeans from the early decades of the Settlement. It was the customary venue for the annual New Year's Day Sports, an event which had become an important local sporting tradition by the late 1830s;<sup>170</sup> these New Year Sports attracted crowds of Asians, who took part in the sports as active competitors as well as spectators.<sup>171</sup> These sporting events provided opportunities for well-to-do Asian ladies to enjoy the festive occasions by riding around the Padang in carriages, as described in a report on the New Year's Day Sports in 1879 in the *Straits Times Overland Journal*.<sup>172</sup> The New Year's Day Sports could also provide annual opportunities for Asian and European elites to join the organising committees and to work together in making the arrangements for the sports; they could also gain public credit for their efforts when the newspapers published the names of the members of the organising committee, thereby confirming their social position through publicity.<sup>173</sup>

Besides these sporting events which were oriented towards the masses, the area of the Padang was also the scene of activities which were more specific to the elites, such as formal socialising and taking drives in carriages. In 1861, Tan Kim Seng, a leading Chinese businessman, invited all the Europeans to a social function he hosted in the

---

<sup>170</sup> W.H. Read, *Play and Politics*, p. 140; *Singapore Chronicle and Commercial Advertiser*, 7 January 1837, p. 3, R0009226; *Singapore Free Press* (January?) 1839, quoted in: C.B. Buckley, pp. 333-334; *Singapore Free Press*, 7 January 1841, p. 3 (also mentioned in C.B. Buckley, p. 352).

<sup>171</sup> Regarding the annual New Year's Day sports, see, for example, the following newspaper reports: *Singapore Free Press*, 4 January 1850, p. 2, NUS microfilm reel R0006016; *Singapore Free Press*, 3 January 1856, p. 2, R0006020; and: *Singapore Free Press*, 5 January 1865, p. 2, R0006027. The report on the 1856 New Year's Day sports in the *Singapore Free Press* refers to the nature of the *usual* sports as *customary*, while the 1850 and 1865 reports suggest the multiracial nature of these events.

<sup>172</sup> *Straits Times Overland Journal*, 4 January 1879, p. 2, NUS microfilm reel R0006771.

<sup>173</sup> See the list of the Asian and European committee members for the 1897 New Year's Day Sea Sports, published in the *Singapore Free Press*, 2 January 1897, p. 2, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0006048.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

Masonic Lodge in Thomas Church's old mansion facing the Padang, on the part of the site now occupied by City Hall (formerly the Municipal Building) that is closest to St. Andrew's Cathedral.<sup>174</sup> An account published in 1887 describes Chinese and other Asians riding in carriages along Beach Road near the Padang, an area where Europeans also enjoyed going for drives and walks.<sup>175</sup> By taking walks and carriage rides around the Padang, Asian and European elites alike could partake in this prestigious setting together and recognise each other as fellow elites, apart from the occasions of imperial celebrations. The Padang, as a prestigious status symbol, belonged to Asian and European elites alike; they asserted their appropriation of this locality as a status symbol by parading around it in their splendid carriages.

Sporting activities were another way for Asian and European elites to symbolically appropriate the Padang as a status symbol. Europeans played cricket on the Padang as early as 1837 and they founded the Singapore Cricket Club in 1852.<sup>176</sup> After watching Europeans playing Western sports on the Padang, Asians began to play these sports among themselves and with Europeans. By 1893, large crowds of Asians gathered to watch soccer matches on the Padang, and some Chinese and Indians had already begun to play the game.<sup>177</sup> By the early decades of the twentieth century, the Padang had become the venue for football games played by Asians and Europeans. In 1938, Sir

---

<sup>174</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 49-50. This Masonic Lodge was a mansion built by George Coleman. It had previously been the home of Thomas Church, who was the Resident Councillor from 1837 to 1856. By the late nineteenth century, this old mansion was part of the Hotel de l'Europe. The Municipality purchased it in 1900 and used it for Municipal offices until the 1920s, when it was demolished and replaced by the Municipal Building, which was opened in 1929 and later renamed City Hall after King George VI proclaimed Singapore a City in 1951. See: C.B. Buckley, pp. 328 and 376, and: Edwin Lee, *Historic Buildings of Singapore*, pp. 37 and 39.

<sup>175</sup> T.J. Keaughran, *Picturesque and Busy Singapore* (1887), pp. 19-20. See also the account of Chinese-owned carriages seen at the Padang in 1901, in: Mary Macfarlane Park, *Greater Britain and the Far East, or 60,000 Miles on the 'Mary Park'* quoted in: John Bastin, *Travellers' Singapore: An Anthology*, p. 167.

<sup>176</sup> C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, pp. 314 and 566.

<sup>177</sup> *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser Weekly Mail Edition*, 2 January 1894, p. 435, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0006042.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

Richard Winstedt noted that football had been one of the greatest cultural influences in Malaya, and that football fields were places where people of different races met.<sup>178</sup> Besides the Padang, Asians also played football on the Raffles Reclamation ground along Beach Road, opposite Raffles Hotel. In the early twentieth century, a British sportsman named E.E. Coleman coached Malay football players on the Raffles Reclamation.<sup>179</sup> In 1919, the Raffles Reclamation was the venue for a football match between a Singapore Malay team and a visiting team of the Penang Mahomedan Football Association, which was attended by Governor Sir Arthur Young his wife, Lady Evelyn Young. The Penang visitors were welcomed at a dinner hosted by A. Rahim Osman and his brothers at their home in Victoria Street, called *Rumah Besar*, and the guests included members of the Alkaff, Alsagoff, and Angullia families, as well as Sheik Dawood, M.V. Pillai, M. Kader Sultan, R.F. Parr, and E.E. Coleman. This social event and the football match at the Raffles Reclamation, both of which were reported in the *Singapore Free Press*, are examples of how sports encouraged contacts between members of different ethnic groups.<sup>180</sup>

By the time that Singapore celebrated the centenary of the Settlement in 1919, the Padang was being managed by the two prestigious sporting clubs located at each end of this field: the (European) Singapore Cricket Club at the end closest to the river, and the (Eurasian) Singapore Recreation Club at the opposite end.<sup>181</sup> Both clubs are still there today, in the same locations where they have been since the nineteenth century. The

---

<sup>178</sup> Sir Richard Winstedt, "Singapore, Past and Present," *British Malaya* (magazine), March 1938, p. 269. See also: John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya 1880-1941*, p. 169.

<sup>179</sup> J.B. van Cuylenburg, *Singapore Through Sunshine and Shadow*, p. 9.

<sup>180</sup> *Singapore Free Press*, 6 February 1919, p. 10, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0006130.

<sup>181</sup> F.J. Hallifax, "Municipal Government," in: Makepeace et al., eds., *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume One, p. 335.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

Cricket Club built its first clubhouse there in the 1860s, the second in the same place in 1877, and the third in 1884; the third clubhouse was expanded in 1907 and in the early 1920s, finally resulting in the building which has survived into the twenty-first century.<sup>182</sup> The Singapore Recreation Club built its first clubhouse in 1885,<sup>183</sup> at the opposite end of the Padang from the Cricket Club, and this club still occupies the same site today, although in a different clubhouse.

Although the Singapore Cricket Club and the Singapore Recreation Club have traditionally enjoyed an especially close association with the Padang, the use of this field for sporting purposes was not confined to the teams of these two clubs. In fact, the members of both of these clubs apparently welcomed visits to the Padang by teams from other clubs. For example, in 1918, the football teams of the Straits Chinese Football Association and the Singapore Cricket Club played a football game at the Cricket Club's end of the Padang, with Governor Sir Arthur Young and Lady Evelyn Young among the spectators.<sup>184</sup> A first-hand account of Singapore at the beginning of the twentieth century mentioned that Malay spectators of football games used to get a better view by climbing onto the Raffles Statue,<sup>185</sup> which stood in the middle of the Padang from 1887 to 1919. Not surprisingly, until the Raffles Statue was moved to Victoria Memorial Hall in 1919, it sometimes suffered the indignity of being hit by balls.<sup>186</sup> A schedule of the football games of the Singapore Football Association, published in the *Malaya Tribune* in 1924, provides a sense of the variety of interracial football games played at the Padang in 1924,

---

<sup>182</sup> Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*, pp. 377-378.

<sup>183</sup> Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*, p. 372.

<sup>184</sup> *Malaya Tribune*, 15 November 1918, p. 5, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0005814.

<sup>185</sup> Edwin Arthur Brown, *Indiscreet Memories*, p. 40.

<sup>186</sup> *Straits Times*, 7 February 1919, p. 10, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016569; *Kok Min Jit Poh*, 7 February 1919, p. 6, NUS Central Library microfilm reel ZR00676.

### *Scenes of Prestige*

including the Singapore Cricket Club versus the Malay Football Team at the Cricket Club ground; the Straits Chinese Football Association versus the Cricket Club at the Singapore Recreation Club ground; and the Singapore Recreation Club versus the Straits Chinese Football Association at the Recreation Club ground.<sup>187</sup> Lee Kip Lee, who enrolled in Raffles College in 1939, recalled that players from Raffles College would travel by bus to the Padang to play rugby matches against members of the Singapore Cricket Club.<sup>188</sup>

Perhaps the Asian and European football players felt that the games they played together at the Padang had an additional significance because this was, in a sense, *hallowed* ground, and had been ever since Raffles signed the treaty with the Malay leaders in 1819 near the future site of the Cricket Club. The history associated with the Padang, especially the associations with the royal celebrations that were held there every year and the backdrop of the prestigious clubhouses of the Recreation Club and the Cricket Club, the monumental government buildings, the picturesque Gothic spires of St. Andrew's Cathedral, and the luxurious hotels in the vicinity, may have made a sporting victory at the Padang seem even more memorable than a similar achievement at some other, less distinctive sports field, elsewhere in Singapore. From the vantage point of the Padang, players and spectators could enjoy a commanding view of the shipping in the harbour, representing the lifeblood of the city and its connection with its Malayan hinterland, the Southeast Asian region, and the rest of the world beyond. It is easy to

---

<sup>187</sup> *Malaya Tribune*, 15 May 1924, p. 8, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0005841.

<sup>188</sup> Lee Kip Lee, *Amber Sands* (1995 edition), p. 93.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

imagine that all those who gathered here for sporting events must have appreciated the distinctiveness of this locality.<sup>189</sup>

The continued attendance and participation of Asians and Europeans in political and sporting rituals at the Padang invested this place with symbolic significance and distinction, and made this sense of prestige available to everyone who took part in rituals there. They demonstrated that this place belonged to them, not only as the stage for solemn imperial rituals, but also as a place where they could play sports together. Both types of activities provided the members of this multiracial elite class with shared experiences and memories associated with the same locality. The social appreciation of the Padang's distinction and prestige was renewed, enhanced, and extended into the future with each successive event, thus creating and reproducing a newly-invented colonial tradition. As a social artefact, the Padang was a prestige mechanism – as Asian and European elites socially sanctified the Padang by staging rituals there and enhancing its symbolic significance within the colonial society, the growing distinction and heritage of the place attracted succeeding generations to take part in its symbolic value, by participating in rituals there. Thus, as Asians and Europeans interacted in rituals at the Padang, they not only enjoyed the symbolism personally, but also cultivated the social integration of at least some of the diverse sections within the multiracial colonial society.

---

<sup>189</sup> See the references to the symbolism of the Padang in: N.G. Aplin and Quek Jin Jong, "Celestials in Touch: Sport and the Chinese in Colonial Singapore," in: J.A. Mangan and Fan Hong, editors, *Sport in Asian Society: Past and Present*, pp. 67 and 74.

### **An Open Stage for Imperial Pageantry**

Of course, the most spectacular rituals enacted upon the Padang in colonial Singapore were the celebrations connected with the imperial monarchy, and these royal celebrations invested the Padang with royal significance. This may be seen as a branding exercise, so to speak, as Asian and European elites branded the Padang as a prestigious imperial status symbol, which local elites could consume together by taking part in imperial rituals there. For these elites, these rituals were communions of prestige, which fostered the representation and integration of their multiracial community of prestige. Over the years, local elites organised rituals at the Padang to coincide with royal celebrations that took place across the Empire. Naturally, the most frequent of these events were the annual royal birthday celebrations, often featuring parades on the Padang, where the Governor could review the troops on behalf of the Crown. In addition to these annual events, there were also other, more important imperial pageants which occurred less frequently, such as spectacular commemorations of royal coronations and jubilees, public receptions for royal visitors, and celebrations of imperial victories in battle. During the celebration of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887, Governor Sir Frederick Weld unveiled a statue of Sir Stamford Raffles in the middle of the Padang, in ceremony that was attended by Sultan Abu Bakar of Johore and other Asian and European dignitaries.<sup>190</sup> Other royal jubilees included Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897, and the silver jubilee of her grandson, King George V, in 1935. In 1922, the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VIII) visited Singapore and unveiled the War

---

<sup>190</sup> *Straits Times* (Weekly Issue), 6 July 1887, p. 7, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0011435.



Memorial at the Padang, a massive Cenotaph inscribed with the names of 124 men from the Colony who died in the First World War.<sup>191</sup>

Imperial celebrations provided local Asians and Europeans with opportunities to march together in parades on the Padang in honour of the Empire. The British military victory at Pretoria in South Africa in 1900 was the occasion of an evening procession of thousands of marchers carrying lanterns from the Padang, up Stamford and Orchard Roads to Government House; this procession included the Chinese, Eurasian, European, Indian, and Malay members of various clubs.<sup>192</sup> In the early decades of the twentieth century, Asians and Europeans who belonged to the Volunteer Forces marched together on the Padang during the annual King's Birthday Parades.<sup>193</sup> They also marched on the Padang in the parades in honour of the Silver Jubilee of King George V in 1935,<sup>194</sup> and the Coronation of King George VI in 1937.<sup>195</sup> Such public rituals typically attracted large crowds of onlookers; for example, the Silver Jubilee Parade at the Padang in 1935 attracted an audience of almost fifty thousand spectators.<sup>196</sup> Since the 1931 Malayan census showed that the total European population of Malaya was less than eighteen thousand,<sup>197</sup> it is clear that most of the fifty thousand spectators at the parade in 1935 must have been Asians. On another occasion during the same Silver Jubilee celebrations in Singapore, thirty thousand people took part in a Chinese lantern procession of two hundred organisations, organised by the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce. The

---

<sup>191</sup> *Singapore Free Press*, 1 April 1922, p. 7, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0006149.

<sup>192</sup> *Straits Times*, 8 June 1900, p. 3, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016463.

<sup>193</sup> See: Yap Pheng Geck, *Scholar, Banker, Gentleman Soldier*, p. 44; and: O.W. Gilmour, *With Freedom to Singapore*, p. 189.

<sup>194</sup> See the photo of Governor Sir Shenton Thomas reviewing the parade of the Malay Company, in: the *Straits Times*, 6 May 1935, p. 12.

<sup>195</sup> *Malaya Tribune*, 13 May 1937, p. 15, and 22 May 1937, p. 20, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0005944.

<sup>196</sup> *Straits Times*, 6 May 1935, p. 11.

<sup>197</sup> C.A. Vlieland, *British Malaya ... A Report on the 1931 Census*, p. 74.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

Chinese leaders who belonged to the committee that organised the event personally led the procession, which proceeded from Clifford Pier to the Padang, and along Stamford Road and Orchard Road to Government House, before concluding at the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Hill Street. This procession was three miles long and was watched by a crowd estimated to have numbered some *two or three hundred thousand spectators* along the parade route.<sup>198</sup>

Aside from extraordinary imperial celebrations, such as the Jubilee and Coronation celebrations, there were also routine military rituals at the Padang which attracted public attention to the Padang. Lee Kip Lee recalled that his father, who was a former Volunteer soldier, took his family to the Padang to watch the monthly Beating of the Retreat in the 1930s, which featured Malay soldiers. According to Lee Kip Lee, crowds of spectators turned out to watch the Beating of the Retreat, and they applauded the marching skill of the soldiers on parade.<sup>199</sup> The public interest that was attracted to the Padang by the military rituals routinely performed there could only have enhanced the prestige and symbolic value of the Padang as a stage for representations of the colonial social structure that took place in this setting, as the scene of the theatrical aspect of the colonial state.

Imperial celebrations provided Asians and Europeans alike with opportunities to take part in exciting and memorable events, which likely gave them at least some sense of unity in their shared loyalty to the Empire and its Crown, symbols which represented the social stability, political order, and economic prosperity which benefited many people here, and especially the elites. Of course, this is not to say that *everyone* necessarily felt

---

<sup>198</sup> *Straits Times*, 8 May 1935, p. 12, gives the number of spectators as 300,000. *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 8 May 1935, p. 5, NUS Central Library microfilm reel ZR04581, gives the number as 200,000.

<sup>199</sup> Lee Kip Lee, *Amber Sands* (1995 edition), p. 23.

that they benefited from this system; but there were apparently *enough* people who felt that they benefited, that these supporters of the Empire could turn out by the thousands to watch parades of imperial troops and local Volunteer soldiers – such as the hundreds of thousands of who crowded the streets during the Silver Jubilee in 1935. A social and political system does not need the support of everyone – it is enough if a *critical mass* of the population is on board, and the crowds that turned out for these celebrations indicated that this system enjoyed the support of such a critical mass.<sup>200</sup>

As a result of these royal celebrations, local Asian and European Volunteer soldiers shared memories and experiences of the Padang as the ceremonial centre of the Settlement, the foremost stage in the local colonial theatre of prestige. The royal celebrations at the Padang reminded the participants – as well as the crowds of thousands of spectators who turned out to witness them – that they belonged, together, to the same symbolic system, a social system which revolved around the Empire and its Crown, and from which they could derive the symbolic rewards of taking part in these rituals, as well as a sense of belonging and membership within the same social structure, through their inclusion in annual royal celebrations. Asian and European elites took part together in organising these public celebrations, and their names and social rankings were publicised together when the local newspapers printed the lists of committee members for these events.<sup>201</sup> The publications of these lists emphasised the shared elite status of the leading

---

<sup>200</sup> See the comments on majority opinion, in: Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chapters 18 and 19.

<sup>201</sup> Regarding multiracial committees (including leading local Asian and European elites) involved in royal and imperial celebrations, see, for example: the reception committee for the visit of Prince Alfred, the Duke of Edinburgh, to Singapore in 1869 (*Straits Times*, 3 July 1869, p. 2, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016422); the reception committee for the visit of Prince Albert Victor and Prince George (later King George V) to Singapore in 1882 (*Singapore Daily Times*, 11 January 1882, p. 2, R0010200); the committee for the local celebrations of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887 (*Straits Times* (weekly issue), 29 June 1887, p. 7, R0011435); the committee for the local celebrations of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 (*Straits Times*, 12 June 1897, p. 2, R0016457); the committee for the celebration of the victory at

Asians and Westerners in the colonial Settlement of Singapore, thus promoting their mutual recognition of one another's social rank, emphasising their close status-proximity in social space, and fostering the cultivation of elite-level social interactions, connections, and acquaintanceships that could bridge the cultural differences between the leading members of the colonial society.

These ceremonies suggested that at least some Asians thought of the colonial system as belonging to themselves as well as to Europeans, and that they thought in terms of the colonial society as one multiracial society, rather than subscribing to a Furnivallian vision of a plural colonial society that was supposedly segregated into *compartmentalised*<sup>202</sup> sections, which supposedly interacted only in the economic sphere. Moreover, these events gave Asian and European colonial elites opportunities to acknowledge and confirm each other's elite status, and to recognise one another as social equals who all belonged together to the multiracial community of prestige at the cosmopolitan summit of the colonial society.

### **Symbolic and Public Centre of the Colonial Society**

The colonial civic centre's monumental architectural backdrop of Empress Place and the Padang, provided by neoclassical public buildings, enhanced the dignity and prestige value of this locality. The distinctiveness of the buildings and spaces helped to attract and focus public attention on the public rituals which took place there, by

---

Pretoria in 1900 (*Straits Times*, 8 June 1900, p. 3, R0016463); the committee for the local celebrations of the coronation of King George V in 1911 (*Straits Times*, 22 June 1911, p. 12, R0016518); and the two committees that were involved in the celebrations in 1919 of the centenary of the Settlement (*Straits Times*, 7 February 1919, p. 10, R0016569).

<sup>202</sup> Regarding the problem of compartmentalisation and the importance of multiethnic interactions in colonial-era Malaya, see: Wu Xiao An, *Chinese Business in the Making of a Malay State, 1882-1941: Kedah and Penang*, pp. 4, 6, 10, 181-182, and 187.

### *Scenes of Prestige*

providing an appropriately spectacular setting for spectacular imperial pageantry – a setting which likely evoked images of the grandeur of ancient Rome and modern capital cities, thanks to a shared neoclassical architectural idiom. The dignity and prestige of the locality was a symbolic resource that was available for the use of the Asian and European elites, who could partake of it together when they gathered there to perform their imperial celebrations. These celebrations not only celebrated the Empire, but also celebrated the elites themselves, their social position, their authority and prestige, their institutions and heritage of elite-level interracial cooperation. When Asian and European elites celebrated the symbols and images of the Empire and its Crown in the civic centre, they were also celebrating their own status and prestige, as individuals and collectively as members of a social class.

These occasional public rituals represented and reproduced the colonial social structure and enhanced its social reality. Asian and Western elites cultivated their social interconnections and sense of fellow membership in the community of shared status at the centre of the colonial society, by taking part together in the creation and enjoyment of the symbolic capital of these prestigious imperial rituals of the imperial civic religion. The attention given to these performances by crowds of onlookers reinforced the sense of the social centrality of the multiracial elite class, giving their social structure an aura of legitimacy, and sanctifying it as routine and institutional, and apparently natural and permanent.

The civic centre of the Padang and Empress Place served as a *marketplace* for the exchange of symbolic capital among Asian and European colonial elites; the civic centre was the social counterpart which corresponded to the economic marketplace at Raffles

### *Scenes of Prestige*

Place. While Asian and Western businessmen engaged in transactions of economic capital in Raffles Place, they assembled periodically at the civic centre on the other side of the Singapore River, at to create, enhance, and share symbolic capital amongst themselves, while enjoying the attention of crowds of spectators that made what was going on in the rituals seem all the more important. Every time these elites cooperated to enhance one another's prestige, they engaged in exchanges of the social resource of symbolic capital, and these exchanges created and enhanced the social connections among them as fellow elites, their differences in cultural backgrounds and ethnic, racial, and national identities notwithstanding. Together, they associated themselves with important status symbols of prestige – the spaces and buildings in the civic centre at Empress Place and the Padang, the institutions and organizations that assembled there and the rituals that were connected with this locality. By using these symbols together, and by working together to enhance and reproduce the prestige value of these symbols, Asian and European elites the symbolic centre of their class, which integrated them as a community of prestige.

When Asian elites joined their Western fellow elites in the civic centre to formally receive royal visitors, to hold meetings of the Legislative Council and the Municipal Commission, and to march together in loyal parades on imperial holidays, they took part together in a communion of prestige or symbolic capital. This imperial theatre of prestige, as a colonial civic religion, sanctified the social structure by providing a metaphor that represented and actualised the colonial social structure, with themselves located together at its summit. The central place of elites in these ritual performances, the attention given to them by crowds of spectators and in accounts published in local

### *Scenes of Prestige*

newspapers, and the central location within the cityscape of the civic centre as the premier stage of the theatre of prestige, were compelling arguments for the public acceptance of the ascendancy and centrality of the elite class and its institutions within the colonial society. This provided an extra incentive for elites to cooperate together closely to maintain their privileged status, and for socially ambitious, status-seeking individuals to aspire to belong to this inner circle by taking part in its status-conferring rituals and institutions, and so to achieve the status of leading elites. The elites of different racial and ethnic sections of the diverse colonial population were brought together and socially combined into a community of prestige at least as much by their shared interest in status and prestige as by the economic factors which are emphasised in the Furnivallian conception of the plural colonial society. *Status* was at least as much at the core of colonial social history in Singapore as were economic interactions and racial identities. While colonial society was divided along the lines of racial and cultural identities, it was integrated at the elite level by affinities of status, and participation together in a shared system of status symbols.<sup>203</sup>

All cultures and races include individuals who crave status and recognition; indeed, these symbolic rewards can even be more important to people than material wealth. Status and recognition are inherently social – they require the involvement of other people. Ambitious Asians and Europeans cooperated and developed connections amongst themselves as much through their mutual striving for prestige or social success, as through their shared interest in economic success. The marketplace of symbolic capital in the civic centre at Empress Place and the Padang was as essential to the colonial system in Singapore as was the marketplace of economic capital at Raffles

---

<sup>203</sup> See: David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*, pp. 10, 126, and 172.

Place; and the meeting and interaction of the Asian and European sections of the colonial society in the status marketplace was at least as important as their meetings in the economic marketplace, which have been highlighted in the Furnivallian notion of the plural colonial society. An attempt to understand the colonial phase of Singapore's social history must include an appreciation of how the elites cultivated their cohesion and solidarity as a social class or community of prestige through the manufacture and social exchange of symbolic capital, which actualised and sustained their location in the centre of their multiracial colonial society.

### **Mansions – Private Social Venues and Status Symbols**

While the setting for imperial pageantry took shape in the civic centre, elites created another type of setting another categories of performances in the theatre of prestige, namely the performances which they enacted in the parlours and dining rooms of their own homes. The fashionable suburbs where the Asian and European elites resided complemented the role of the public buildings and spaces in fostering the social integration of the elite social class, and placing these elites and their class at the centre of the colonial society. Their private mansions were highly conspicuous residential trophies of economic success and consumption as well as badges of elite status, that were very much on public view in the theatre of prestige of the colonial society, providing a means for these elites to conspicuously display their wealth and social status, and to affirm their prestige, by showing who among them were the richest of the rich, as indicated by the size, location, decoration, and number of their homes.<sup>204</sup> These mansions were the

---

<sup>204</sup> Regarding conspicuous display, see: Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*; Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology*, Volume II (1893), Part IV, Chapter X, pp. 195, 197, and 198; and:



outward manifestations and signs of the outstanding economic achievements of Asian elites within the framework of the colonial system, a system which largely belonged to them, and which served their interests, symbolically as well as economically.

Today, there might be a perception prevailing among some people that colonial mansions were somehow especially associated with Westerners.<sup>205</sup> Readers might form the impression that there was some sort of spatial or residential segregation along racial lines, from reading accounts of colonial Singapore which mention the homes and neighbourhoods where well-to-do Europeans lived.<sup>206</sup> In fact, wealthy Asians lived in the same localities as wealthy Europeans, and it is likely that most mansions here were actually the homes of wealthy Asians, and that these homes dominated their prestigious neighbourhoods.<sup>207</sup> These facts indicate the great extent to which Asian elites participated in the economic and symbolic systems of the colonial order, as major stakeholders and leading beneficiaries of the colonial system. The visibility of the mansions of wealthy Asians, and the location of these homes in the most prestigious localities of colonial Singapore, left no doubt that Asian elites not only belonged to the colonial elite class, but

---

Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, p. 169. Regarding the psychological need of Chinese immigrants to gain prestige through the display of wealth, see: Yen Ching-hwang, "Ch'ing's Sale of Honours and the Chinese Leadership in Singapore and Malaya (1877-1912)," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Volume 1, Number 2 (September 1970), pp. 20-32, especially pp. 26-28.

<sup>205</sup> Norman Edwards, "The Colonial Suburb: Public Space as Private Space." In: Chua Beng-Huat and Norman Edwards, editors, *Public Space: Design, Use and Management*, pp. 24-39.

<sup>206</sup> See, for example: Brenda S.A. Yeoh, *Contesting Space: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment in Colonial Singapore*, pp. 45-46 and 48; Chua Beng Huat, "Erased Tropical Heritage: Residential Architecture and Environment," in: Chan Kwok Bun and Tong Chee Kiong, editors, *Past Times: A Social History of Singapore*, pp. 98 and 100; and: Norman Edwards, "The Colonial Suburb: Public Space as Private Space," in: Chua Beng-Huat and Norman Edwards, editors, *Public Space: Design, Use and Management*, pp. 24-39; in this essay, Norman Edwards focused on the mansions of Europeans, and how these mansions displayed the superior colonial social position of these Europeans, and their economic and political separation from the Asians in a plural society here (p. 37); however, one of the illustrations in this essay (Plate 3.4) is a photograph of Panglima Prang, the Western-style mansion of a wealthy local Chinese family. Regarding the history of Panglima Prang, see: Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*, pp. 42 and 154-157.

<sup>207</sup> See: John H. MacCallum Scott, *Eastern Journey* (1939), p. 18.

that these wealthy Asians were the most numerous and most opulent members of this multiracial class. Besides the private homes of wealthy local individuals and families, other types of houses – the houses of *institutions* – were also especially associated with elites, including prestigious clubhouses and schools, the headquarters of important organisations, and even houses of worship. All of these houses offered prestigious venues for elites to socialise with one another and to affirm their fellow membership in the elite class, by associating the elites with the architectural dignity of distinguished façades and stately halls. Indeed, the private homes of some of the richest Asians compared favourably with Government House, the residence of the colonial governors.<sup>208</sup>

### **Government House (now the Istana)**

The most conspicuous mansion in colonial Singapore was Government House, which is today the Istana or palace of the President of the Republic of Singapore.<sup>209</sup> This palace was the scene of grand social functions during the colonial era, for which its imposing architectural characteristics and commanding hilltop location, together with its luxuriant grounds, a splendid park called the Domain covering almost one hundred acres, provided a suitably distinctive and prestigious setting.<sup>210</sup> The importance of this building survived momentous developments in the island's history, including the end of the

---

<sup>208</sup> Fred Riley, *A Trip Round the World* (1900), quoted in: John Bastin, *Travellers' Singapore: An Anthology*, p. 160. See also: Arnold Wright and Thomas H. Reid, *The Malay Peninsula* (1912), p. 227.

<sup>209</sup> Edwin Lee, *Historic Buildings of Singapore*, pp. 83-84. This palace was still listed as Government House in the 1962 edition of *The Straits Times Directory of Singapore & Malaya* (p. 495); but the 1963 edition (p. 531) described it as *Istana Negara*. It was still listed as the *Istana Negara* in the 1966 edition of *The Straits Times Directory of Malaysia & Singapore* (p. 613), but the word *Negara* did not appear in the listing for the *Istana* in the 1967 edition (p. 603).

<sup>210</sup> See the descriptions of Government House in: T.J. Keaughran, *Picturesque and Busy Singapore* (1887), pp. 21-25; John Dill Ross, *The Capital of a Little Empire: A Descriptive Study of a British Crown Colony in the Far East* (1898), pp. 64-68; Colonel R.H. Vetch, editor, *Life of Lieut.-General the Hon. Sir Andrew Clarke, G.C.M.G., C.B., C.I.E.* (1905), pp. 131 and 180-181; and: G.M. Reith, *Handbook to Singapore with Map*, second edition, revised by Walter Makepeace (1907), republished in 1985 with an introduction by Paul Kratoska, pp. 55-56.

colonial era. This stately neoclassical palace on a hill near Orchard Road was the residence of the Governors of the Crown Colony of the Straits Settlements from the completion of the building in 1869<sup>211</sup> until the Japanese conquered Singapore in 1942. Japanese Field Marshal Count Terauchi lived there during the Japanese Occupation<sup>212</sup> – clearly, the dignity of this monumental status symbol appealed to the Japanese conquerors. Admiral Lord Mountbatten, the Supreme Allied Commander, South East-Asia, moved into Government House after accepting the surrender of the Japanese military in Singapore on 12 September 1945.<sup>213</sup> Lord Mountbatten lived in a small apartment upstairs in one wing of the palace. He stayed at Government House until early 1946. The palace seems to have suffered from a shortage of silverware at that time; during a luncheon there, one of Lord Mountbatten’s guests, the wealthy banker Tan Chin Tuan, noticed that the silverware and crockery on the table displayed the emblems of Raffles Hotel and the Adelphi Hotel.<sup>214</sup> Lord Mountbatten’s stay at Government House is commemorated by a Japanese gun which was presented to him, and which is still prominently displayed on the grounds in front of the Istana.<sup>215</sup> Government House served as the residence of the Governors of the Crown Colony of Singapore from 1946 to 1959, when Singapore became a self-governing state.

Singapore experienced rapid changes in its political status in the 1960s, beginning the decade as a self-governing state, then becoming a state within Malaysia in 1963, and finally achieving independence as a Republic in 1965; yet the former Government House

---

<sup>211</sup> *Straits Times*, 30 October 1869, p. 1, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016422.

<sup>212</sup> E.J.H. Corner, *The Marquis: A Tale of Syonan-to*, p. 47.

<sup>213</sup> Admiral the Lord Louis Mountbatten, *Personal Diary of Admiral the Lord Louis Mountbatten Supreme Allied Commander, South-East Asia, 1943-1946*, pp. 244-251, 256, 267, and 273.

<sup>214</sup> Mike Macbeth, *Quiet Achiever: The Life and Times of Tan Sri Dr. Tan Chin Tuan*, p. 79.

<sup>215</sup> Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*, p. 218.

maintained its symbolic importance despite these changes. The palace was the home of the Yang di-Pertuan Negara or Head of State from 1959 to 1965,<sup>216</sup> and of the President of the Republic of Singapore from 1965 onwards. The apparent ease with which this palace was adapted to different phases in the island's political history reflects the success of colonial elites in their efforts to invest the building with lasting symbolic value – efforts which were so successful that the symbolic importance of this house actually outlasted the colonial era, and is still alive and well today. Here, the President of Singapore receives foreign leaders; and here, on certain public holidays, crowds of visitors are allowed to stroll about the grounds and view some of the rooms in the Istana.

The construction of Government House represented the culmination of a process of official residential development that spanned half a century, from the founding of the Settlement in 1819 to the inauguration of the palace in 1869. This process may be traced back to a house built in 1819 by the first Resident of Singapore, William Farquhar. This house, known as the Residency House, was the earliest precursor to Government House. Sir Stamford Raffles founded the Settlement during the first of his three visits to Singapore; his first visit lasted for a mere nine days.<sup>217</sup> When Raffles left Singapore in February 1819 at the end of this first visit, he left Major William Farquhar in charge of the Settlement, as its first Resident and Commandant.<sup>218</sup> Farquhar was promoted to the

---

<sup>216</sup> The office of Yang di-Pertuan Negara was held by two men: Sir William Goode in 1959, and Yusof bin Ishak from 1959 to 1965.

<sup>217</sup> Ernest C.T. Chew, "Founders and Builders of Early Colonial Singapore." In: Irene Lim, editor. *Sketching the Straits: A Compilation of the Lecture Series on the Charles Dyce Collection*, p. 24.

<sup>218</sup> See the Proclamation issued by Raffles on 6 February 1819, in: C.D. Cowan, C.D., editor, "Early Penang & the Rise of Singapore ...," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume XXIII, Part 2, (March 1950), pp. 89-90, extract 69. See also: C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 49.

rank of Lieutenant-Colonel in 1821,<sup>219</sup> and he held his dual appointment as Resident and Commandant of Singapore from 1819 until May 1823.<sup>220</sup>

Farquhar established his Residency House on the future Europe Hotel and Supreme Court site, in a complex of *attap* (or thatched) structures which managed to survive until they were demolished in 1827, although they had decayed by that time.<sup>221</sup> This Residency House may be regarded as the nearest approximation to a Government House in the Settlement from 1819 until the end of 1822, when Raffles built the first *official* Government House in Singapore. He moved into this house by January 1823. This was a bungalow measuring one hundred feet wide and fifty feet deep, on the summit of *Bukit Larangan*,<sup>222</sup> also known as Singapore Hill<sup>223</sup> and Government Hill,<sup>224</sup> the hill which became Fort Canning Hill after Fort Canning was built there in the 1860s. Raffles wrote that the climate was very different on the hill than in the town below, and that his health improved after he moved into the bungalow.<sup>225</sup>

An account of this bungalow, describing it as it was less than two years after Raffles moved out of it, suggests that elements of Asian culture had been introduced into the lifestyle of this household. An American visitor named William Hunter arrived in Singapore in April 1825. During the two months he spent in Singapore, Hunter enjoyed

---

<sup>219</sup> See the note, presumably written by A.H. Hill, in: Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, *The Hikayat Abdullah*, translated by A.H. Hill, p. 65, footnote 1.

<sup>220</sup> C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 104.

<sup>221</sup> Leong Foke Meng, "Early Land Transactions in Singapore: The Real Estates of William Farquhar (1774-1839), John Crawford (1783-1868), and Their Families," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume LXXVII, Part 1 (June 2004), p. 26, and: Capt. H.F. Pearson, "Singapore from the Sea, June 1823. Notes on a Recently Discovered Sketch attributed to Lt. Phillip Jackson," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume 26, Part I, July 1953, p. 55.

<sup>222</sup> C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, pp. 77 and 95.

<sup>223</sup> Sir Stamford Raffles, letter to William Marsden, 21 January 1823, in: Lady Raffles, *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles* (1830; reprinted in 1991), p. 535.

<sup>224</sup> William C. Hunter, *Bits of Old China*, p. 231; C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, pp. 215, 283, 641, and 717.

<sup>225</sup> Sir Stamford Raffles, letter to William Marsden, 21 January 1823; and: letter to the Duchess of Somerset, 23 January 1823, both in: Lady Raffles, *Memoir* (1830), p. 535.

the hospitality of Dr. John Crawford, who was then the Resident of Singapore and lived in the bungalow. Hunter described this Government House as a spacious dwelling offering an enchanting view across Singapore and beyond to the neighbouring islands. Here, dinner was served in a dining room with a floor covered with matting, by servants attired in white robes and turbans, and after dinner, the ladies left the room, while the men stayed behind to smoke *hookahs*, which are also known as water-pipes.<sup>226</sup>

Both Farquhar's Residency House and Sir Stamford's hilltop bungalow associated European authority with traditional Malay authority. Farquhar's Residency House was built near where Sultan Hussein and Temenggong Abdul Rahman stayed in 1819, while Sir Stamford's bungalow was built in a place which had far more profound and ancient connections with Malay heritage and traditions of authority. By building his bungalow on *Bukit Larangan*, the Forbidden Hill, Raffles associated himself with a place which was sacred to the Malays.<sup>227</sup> Raffles believed that the tombs of Malay kings were near this bungalow, and he wrote that, if he died in Singapore, he wanted to be buried near these tombs.<sup>228</sup>

The association of new European authority with the traditional authority of Malay royalty may be an example of a practice described by D.A. Low, in which one of the characteristics of the early stages of imperialism is the incorporation of traditional authority into the new imperial authority structure. D.A. Low discussed the incorporation of traditional elite personnel into the organisational structure of this new imperial

---

<sup>226</sup> William C. Hunter, *Bits of Old China* (1855; republished in 1966), pp. 233-234. I am grateful to NUS Central Library Senior Librarian Tim Yap Fuan for kindly bringing this book to my attention.

<sup>227</sup> C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 53.

<sup>228</sup> Sir Stamford Raffles, letter to William Marsden, 21 January 1823, and: letter to the Duchess of Somerset, 23 January 1823, in: Lady Raffles, *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles* (1830; reprinted in 1991), p. 535.

authority – for example, by institutionalising the exercise of imperial authority through alliances formed with traditional kings, chiefs, and village headmen, or by securing the status of elites who were not dominant, or even by selecting new chiefs.<sup>229</sup> Both of these practices were present in the case of Singapore, where the history of the Settlement began with a treaty of alliance between the new European authority structure on the one hand, and the traditional Malay royal authority on the other, as represented and personalised by Sultan Hussein and Temenggong Abdul Rahman.

Meanwhile, the recognition by Raffles of Sultan Hussein as the rightful claimant to the title of Sultan of Johore (a title which was disputed by Sultan Hussein's younger brother, who was recognised by the Dutch colonial government) fits the practice described by D.A. Low, in which the new imperial authorities often recognised traditional elites who were not dominant, secured their status, and formed alliances with them.<sup>230</sup> Such practices continued throughout the colonial era, as the colonial social and political structure (a structure which included Asian and European elites) incorporated individuals whose economic success and public service activities had brought them prominence and leadership roles within their own communities; and this incorporation was cemented by the conferral of honours upon these elite individuals and their expressions of loyalty to the system.<sup>231</sup>

However, the incorporation of traditional authority into the new imperial authority structure, as described by D.A. Low, can be extended from the incorporation of the *personnel* or elites of traditional authority structures which he discussed, to the incorporation of inanimate *symbols* of traditional authority into the new symbolic system

---

<sup>229</sup> D.A. Low, *Lion Rampant: Essays in the Study of British Imperialism*, pp. 17, 18-19, and 28.

<sup>230</sup> D.A. Low, *Lion Rampant: Essays in the Study of British Imperialism*, p. 19.

<sup>231</sup> See: David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*, p. 122.

of the colonial society. This is what happened when Farquhar and Raffles each chose to establish their Singapore residences in localities that were associated with traditional Malay royal authority. This incorporation of symbols of traditional authority conforms to the spirit of the process described by D.A. Low; in fact, the incorporation of elite personnel discussed by Low may be seen as a symbolic incorporation, since the traditional kings and chiefs may be regarded as living symbols of traditional authority.

It is reasonable to infer that Farquhar and Raffles may have taken symbolic considerations into account when they chose to build their houses in places that were connected with Malay royalty. Similarly, Raffles proudly associated himself with an Asian royal decoration, after being honoured by the Sultan of Aceh in 1811 with the distinction of *Sri Paduka Orangkaya Berpedang Emas*, which might be translated as *Knight of the Order of the Golden Sword*. Raffles found a way to further commemorate this honour, by asking the College of Arms in England to incorporate an image of the insignia of the Acehnesse Order into his armorial bearings after he was knighted by the Prince Regent in 1817. Raffles thus incorporated a symbol of Asian traditional authority and royal honour into his own self-image, in combination with the honour of knighthood which he had received from the British Crown.<sup>232</sup> The fact that Raffles was so interested in the symbolism of the Order of the Golden Sword, and that he chose to include this symbol in his own armorial bearings, suggests that he may also have taken symbolic considerations into account when he chose to have his bungalow built on a hill that was associated with ancient royal rulers.

---

<sup>232</sup> C.A. Gibson-Hill, "Raffles, Aceh and the Order of the Golden Sword," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume 29, Part 1 (May 1956), pp. 1-19; and: Lee Kam Hing and Ahmat Adam, "Raffles' Order of the Golden Sword Reviewed," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume 63, Part 2 (December 1990), pp. 77-89.



## *Scenes of Prestige*

It would seem that there were two stages in the building-up of the symbolic meaning of these two early residences of leading local officials. The first step was to build the house in a location which was associated with traditional Asian ideas of authority and prestige. The second step was to invite Asian elites and Europeans to gather and mingle there during social functions, thus consecrating these homes as scenes of prestige. An example of the hosting of Asian elites at the Residency House was a meeting that was convened by Raffles in 1823, in which he announced his plans for the Singapore Institution. The guests at this meeting included Sultan Hussein and Temenggong Abdul Rahman, together with their officials, as well as the leading Europeans of Singapore.<sup>233</sup>

A social gathering in honour of the birthday of King George IV took place one evening in April 1827, at the bungalow on Government Hill, the hill which would later become Fort Canning Hill. Javanese dancers and musicians entertained the guests by lamplight, followed by the dinner and the offering of loyal toasts to important personages, including the King, his brothers, the Governor-General of India, the Governor Fullerton of the Straits Settlements, and the memory of Sir Stamford Raffles. Besides the European guests, there were also at least two Asian elites who were included in this royal birthday celebration: Sultan Hussein and a son of the late Temenggong Abdul Rahman,<sup>234</sup> whose name was Tun Ibrahim. He was also known as Daing Ronggek, Tengku Chik, and Daing Kechil. He succeeded to his father's leadership role upon his father's death in 1825, and he received the title of Temenggong in 1841.<sup>235</sup>

---

<sup>233</sup> Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, *The Hikayat Abdullah: The Autobiography of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir (1797-1854)*, translated by A.H. Hill, pp. 180-181; and: Lady Raffles, *Memoir* (1830), Appendix p. 74.

<sup>234</sup> *Singapore Chronicle*, 26 April 1827, p. 3, R0009222.

<sup>235</sup> Sir Richard Winstedt, *A History of Johore (1365-1895)*, pp. 89 and 91.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

Governor Butterworth staged a ceremony for Temenggong Ibrahim in 1846, in order to publicly honour the Temenggong with the gift of an engraved sword. Arabs, Chinese, Europeans, Indians, Javanese, and Malays attended this ceremony, and watched as Governor Butterworth presented the sword to Temenggong Ibrahim on the verandah of the hilltop, which by this time had become known as Government House. The dignity of the ceremony was enhanced by large numbers of Indian soldiers who lined the road to Government House, the firing of a salute as the Temenggong's carriage arrived at Government House, and a portrait of young Queen Victoria displayed on the verandah. The Governor made a speech in which he explained that he was giving the sword to the Temenggong on behalf of the East India Company as a token of gratitude for the Temenggong's cooperation in the suppression of piracy, and the Temenggong replied with a speech expressing his profound gratitude for this honour, and assuring the Governor that the sword would become a treasured heirloom in his family. Charles Burton Buckley recalled that Temenggong Ibrahim's son and successor, Sultan Abu Bakar of Johore, often brought the Sword of Honour with him to the celebrations of Queen Victoria's birthday at Government House in Singapore.<sup>236</sup>

After presiding over the growing town of Singapore from its hilltop site for nearly forty years, the first Government House was finally replaced by fortifications. Sir Stamford's Government House was demolished in 1859 to make way for Fort Canning,<sup>237</sup> which was largely completed in 1860.<sup>238</sup> While the location of the first

---

<sup>236</sup> Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, *The Hikayat Abdullah: The Autobiography of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir (1797-1854)*, translated by A.H. Hill, pp. 301-303, and: C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, pp. 449-450.

<sup>237</sup> C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 95.

<sup>238</sup> John N. Miksic, "From Fieldworks to Fort Canning 1823-1866," in: Malcolm H. Murfett, John N. Miksic, Brian P. Farrell, and Chiang Ming Shun, *Between Two Oceans: A Military History of Singapore From First Settlement to Final British Withdrawal*, p. 79.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

Government House was apparently determined personally by Raffles, the second Government House was rented from a European merchant, meaning that the political leadership likely had nothing to do with the planning or construction of this house. This second Government House was at Leonie Hill in Grange Road. It held this distinction from 1859 until 1869, when Governor Harry St. George Ord moved into the newly-completed third and final Government House,<sup>239</sup> a grand mansion off Orchard Road, which was built by Indian convict labourers and measures 230 feet wide by 180 feet deep, with a tower that is eighty feet high, and white Javanese marble flooring.<sup>240</sup> This palace was completed just in time for the Governor to host Prince Alfred, the Duke of Edinburgh, during his brief visit to Singapore in December 1869,<sup>241</sup> a visit which was commemorated by the naming of the lane leading from Orchard Road into the Government House Domain as Edinburgh Road.<sup>242</sup>

These three Government Houses reveal a pattern: each one was located on a hill. This provided them each with commanding views of the town and the surrounding countryside – and (at least in the cases of the first and third government houses) of the harbour and nearby islands as well.<sup>243</sup> The choice of the distinctive sites of these houses reflected the dignity and status of their occupants. Herbert Spencer noted the connection between the relative elevation or height of houses and the expression of social distinctions and superiority in different cultures.<sup>244</sup> The lofty locations of all three

---

<sup>239</sup> C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 95.

<sup>240</sup> Major J.F.A. McNair, *Prisoners Their Own Warders* (1899), pp. 101-104; Edwin Lee, *Historic Buildings of Singapore*, p. 83.

<sup>241</sup> *Straits Times*, 4 December 1869, p. 1, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016422.

<sup>242</sup> Peter K.G. Dunlop, *Street Names of Singapore*, p. 74.

<sup>243</sup> *Straits Times*, 24 July 1869, p. 1, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016422; T.J. Keaughran, *Picturesque and Busy Singapore* (1887), p. 21; Major J.F.A. McNair, *Prisoners Their Own Warders* (1899), p. 102; G.M. Reith, *Handbook to Singapore with Map* (1907, republished in 1985), p. 56.

<sup>244</sup> Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology* (1893), Volume II, p. 197.

### *Scenes of Prestige*

Government Houses made them all the more appropriate as scenes of prestige, architectural symbols of elite status which confirmed the social standing of those who were invited to social functions that were hosted by Governors. Hilltop locations with good views gave additional symbolic value to these residences, making them more conspicuous to the general public as landmarks on the cityscape, allowing elite guests to share in this distinction when they attended social receptions and dinners there, at the same time that they derived prestige rewards by associating with their fellow elites at these functions, recognising one another as fellow members of the multiracial community of prestige. By flocking to attend these functions, Asian and European elites further enhanced the symbolic value of these houses, creating and sustaining a new local tradition of Government House as a prestige-conferring institution and a status symbol for all who enjoyed the privilege of being invited there.

Another way in which Asian elites contributed to the symbolic value of Government House was by organising massive processions and leading them there, and thereby establishing a new local tradition that helped draw attention to this palace. The tradition of processions by Chinese and other Asians was another example of a symbol of Asian social capital which was incorporated into the colonial symbolic system, and which became a component of the newly-invented tradition of local imperial celebrations that were associated with Government House. This was accomplished through the agency of Asian elites themselves, as they organised the processions and led them to Governor's residence.

The Asian processions to Government House evolved from earlier Asian traditions. The Chinese of the Straits Settlements had a long history of holding

processions.<sup>245</sup> In 1840, Chinese in Singapore organised an elaborate procession in honour of the Goddess of the Sea.<sup>246</sup> The lavish public celebration of Chinese New Year was evidently a well-established custom in Singapore by 1842, as indicated by a contemporary description of that year's festivities.<sup>247</sup> The Indians of Singapore established their own tradition of holding processions in the streets by the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>248</sup> Processions were also important funerary rituals: when well-to-do Chinese died, their memory was customarily honoured in public with long funeral processions in the streets;<sup>249</sup> and if the deceased was the leader of an organisation (such as a secret society), then an impressive funeral procession would publicly demonstrate the importance of the organisation as well as the deceased.<sup>250</sup> In addition to honouring the sanctity of a deity, the power of a secret society, or the memory of a deceased individual, a Chinese procession could also be organised in honour of an important living person, as with the procession in October 1892 in honour of the wealthy opium merchant Cheang Hong Lim by members of the Hokkien community, who marched to his residence in Havelock Road.<sup>251</sup>

Over time, processions of Chinese and other Asians were incorporated into the local traditions of imperial celebrations, as it became customary for orderly crowds of

---

<sup>245</sup> See the petition presented by the Chinese community of Penang in September 1856, quoted in: Wilfred Blythe, *The Impact of Chinese Secret Societies in Malaya*, p. 87.

<sup>246</sup> Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, p. 41, and C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, pp. 345-346.

<sup>247</sup> Charles Wilkes, *The Singapore Chapter of the Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition, during the Years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842* (a 1984 reprint of a chapter of a book originally published in 1845), pp. 14-16.

<sup>248</sup> See the mention of Indian processions in the petition presented by the Chinese of Singapore to Lord Dalhousie, published in the *Singapore Free Press*, 22 February 1850, p. 4, R0006016.

<sup>249</sup> R.C.H. McKie, *This Was Singapore* (1942), pp. 44-46; Ida Pfeiffer, *A Woman's Journey Round The World*, pp. 111-112.

<sup>250</sup> Wilfred Blythe, *The Impact of Chinese Secret Societies in Malaya*, pp. 67-68; J.D. Vaughan, *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese of the Straits Settlements* (1879; reprinted in 1985), p. 31.

<sup>251</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 270-271.

### *Scenes of Prestige*

Asians to march to Government House on these occasions, in parades organised by Asian elites. During the celebration of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887, a vast procession of Chinese marched to Government House, where a dance was in progress. Some of the marchers played musical instruments, while others carried lanterns shaped like dragons and fish. The quadrille in the Government House ballroom was stopped so that the Governor's guests, including Sultan Abu Bakar of Johore, could go out to watch the colourful display.<sup>252</sup> This procession was two miles in length and comprised no less than twenty thousand men, including members of the Ghi Hin, Ghi Hok, and Hok Hin secret societies. In addition to Chinese, processions of Arabs, Indians, and Malays also marched during the Golden Jubilee, and the names of the organisers were published in the *Straits Times*: Syed Muhammed Alsagoff, A. Annamalai, M.K. Raman Chitty, Savana Golam Mydin, the Honourable Legislative Councillor Seah Liang Seah, and Tan Kim Ching (the head of the Hokkien Huay Kuan and the eldest son of Tan Tock Seng).<sup>253</sup>

The tradition of holding processions to Government House in honour of imperial occasions continued over the following decades, and the parades apparently became even more impressive with the passage of time. A procession in honour of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 reportedly cost fifteen thousand dollars; the Toa Peh Kong temple provided the procession with a representation of a dragon that was three hundred feet long.<sup>254</sup> In 1900, after the news of the British victory at Pretoria was reported in Singapore, thousands of marchers carrying lanterns, including members of Chinese, Eurasian, European, Indian, and Malay clubs, marched from the Padang and up Stamford and Orchard Roads to Government House. The names of the organisers of this

---

<sup>252</sup> *Straits Times*, weekly issue, 6 July 1887, p. 10, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0011435.

<sup>253</sup> *Straits Times*, weekly issue, 6 July 1887, p. 12, R0011435.

<sup>254</sup> *Straits Times*, 26 June 1897, p. 3, R0016457.

procession were published in the *Straits Times*, including Charles Burton Buckley, Lee Choon Guan, Dr. Lim Boon Keng, Lt.-Col. Pennefather, Captain St. Clair, Seah Liang Seah, Song Ong Siang, Tan Boo Liat, Tan Jiak Kim, and E. Tessensohn, among others.<sup>255</sup>

Other examples of this processional tradition included parades in honour of the visit of Prince Arthur of Connaught (a grandson of Queen Victoria) in 1906, and of his parents, Prince Arthur and Princess Louise, the Duke and Duchess of Connaught, in 1907;<sup>256</sup> the celebrations in Singapore in honour of the coronation of King George V in 1911<sup>257</sup> and his Silver Jubilee in 1935, which featured thirty thousand marchers in a procession that was three miles long and attracted two or three hundred spectators along the parade route.<sup>258</sup> It would seem likely that Asian leaders chose to organise processions through the streets to Government House as a way of displaying the prestige of their organisations and their own leadership status within their communities. By doing so, they invested Government House with importance as a symbol of prestige for the entire population of Singapore, at the same time as they claimed a degree of ownership of these symbols and of the colonial system itself. Asian and European elites received prestige by associating with the monumental and palatial status symbol of Government House, which thus became one of the central symbols around which the multiracial elite class was united in the cultivation, consumption, and communion of symbolic resources.

Perhaps the most important pattern in the series of houses that led to the construction of the palace at Edinburgh Road was the linkage of these new architectural symbols of authority with the traditions of royal authority, whether Asian or European,

---

<sup>255</sup> *Straits Times*, 8 June 1900, p. 3, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016463.

<sup>256</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese*, pp. 385-386 and 410-411.

<sup>257</sup> *Straits Times*, 23 June 1911, p. 7, R0016518.

<sup>258</sup> *Straits Times*, 8 May 1935, p. 12, gives the number of spectators as 300,000. *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 8 May 1935, p. 5, NUS Central Library microfilm reel ZR04581, gives the number as 200,000.

### *Scenes of Prestige*

thus fashioning new traditions of colonial authority in Singapore. Farquhar's Residency House, Sir Stamford's hilltop bungalow, and Governor Ord's splendid Government House, were each associated with the traditional authority of royalty in some way. However, the second Government House at Leonie Hill seems to have been an exception to this pattern, a ten-year interlude (from 1859 to 1869) in a sequence of linkages between the new authority structure of the Settlement and the traditional authority of royalty – first Malay royalty, and then European royalty.

The progression from Farquhar's residence to Sir Stamford's hilltop bungalow and finally to Governor Ord's palace represented a shift from the incorporation of traditional Malay royal authority through the association of the first two of these houses with places that were already significant, to the association of the third Government House with the traditional authority of *European* royalty represented by Prince Alfred and other members of his family, as well as the employment of grand neoclassical architecture which evoked the heritage of the Roman Empire. The third and final Government House was a palace fit for a Proconsul. While the first two of these residences were each built in localities that were connected with Malay royalty, Governor Ord's palace was associated with the British royal family – first by the visit of Prince Alfred, then by the naming of Edinburgh Road in Prince Alfred's honour, and subsequently by other royal visitors and the annual royal birthday celebrations, as well as a number of extraordinary royal rituals. The receptions for visiting princes and the celebrations of royal birthdays each involved the conspicuous participation of Asian elites.



### **Chinese Elites and the Statue of Queen Victoria in Government House**

Government House was further dignified and embellished with royal and imperial significance when a group of thirty-five Chinese led by a Chinese Legislative Councillor, the Honourable Seah Liang Seah, donated a marble statue of Queen Victoria, which was installed in a prominent location inside Government House in 1889. The Honourable Seah Liang Seah and his associates donated the funds for the statue at the time of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887. The unveiling of the statue provided the occasion for a ceremony at Government House that was attended by Chinese elites, including Cheang Hong Lim, Lee Cheng Yan, Tan Kim Ching, Tan Jiak Kim, and Hoo Ah Yip Whampoa (the son of the late Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa, CMG), and, of course, the Honourable Seah Liang Seah. Governor Sir Cecil Clementi Smith gave a speech in which he praised the Chinese for their loyalty to Queen Victoria, and the Honourable Seah Liang Seah reciprocated in his own speech by reaffirming the loyalty of the Chinese to the Queen-Empress. This ceremony was publicised in both the Chinese-language and English-language local press.<sup>259</sup> The event was also recorded in a photograph, showing the Chinese leaders dressed in their honorary mandarin robes grouped around the statue, along with the Governor and a few other Europeans.<sup>260</sup>

The unveiling ceremony of the Queen's statue was a social exchange of symbolic capital, in which the Honourable Seah Liang Seah (representing the Chinese elites) exchanged expressions of praise with Governor Smith (representing the colonial state).

---

<sup>259</sup> *Lat Pau*, 27 February 1889, p. 2, NUS microfilm reel ZR00696.; *Straits Times*, 26 February 1889, p. 2, NUS microfilm reel R0016441. See also: *Straits Times* (weekly issue), 15 June 1887, pp. 7 and 8, NUS microfilm R0011435.

<sup>260</sup> This photo was published in: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, facing p. 249. This photo was reproduced in: Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, Plate 15, and a montage of this photo appears on the cover.

Although the expression of deference by the Chinese was ostensibly directed towards the Crown, it was really directed at least as much to the Western elites and their institutions which claimed legitimacy from the Crown. This process of exchange was inscribed upon Government House, since the statue remained on display in Government House until the Japanese conquered Singapore in 1942, and was also displayed there after the war until the end of the colonial era in 1959. Visitors to Government House could read the inscription on the statue's pedestal, which recorded its donation by the Chinese community, as well as their expression of loyalty towards Queen Victoria; some of these visitors had their pictures taken with the statue.<sup>261</sup> The presence and conspicuous display of a Chinese-donated statue of Queen Victoria in Government House asserted that both the monarchy and the palace were symbols which belonged at least in part to elite Asians. So long as this statue was in Government House, Chinese elites were, in a symbolic sense, constantly present there. The statue thus represented the location of Chinese elites in the centre of the colonial system in Singapore, and by extension, it showed that other non-Chinese Asian elites could also belong to this multiracial centre, and be thereby officially recognised as Asian members of the colonial elite class.

From its opening in 1869, the palatial third Government House provided a dignified venue for colonial social functions, until Singapore's colonial era ended ninety years later. These events included the annual royal birthday celebrations, which were hosted by the Governors and their Ladies for their invited guests, including Asian and European elites.<sup>262</sup> Invitations to, and attendance at, these social functions were

---

<sup>261</sup> Several of these photos are now in the collection of the National Archives of Singapore, Accession Numbers: 66960, 67433, 69539, 71530, and 71585.

<sup>262</sup> Regarding the multiracial guests at Government House functions, see, for example, the guest lists in: *Straits Times*, 6 July 1887 (Weekly Issue), p. 11, R0011435; *Straits Times*, 25 June 1897, p. 3, R0016457;

important status symbols. During these gatherings, elites could recognise one another as fellow members of the elite class, in spite of their racial and cultural differences. Accounts of these events, including lists of the guests who attended, were published in local newspapers, which further emphasised their status as members of the elite class, and presented this information not only to the elites, but to the wider reading public as well. By putting elites together in the same place, these social functions likely promoted social contacts among elites of various backgrounds, nationalities, and cultural identities, and provided local elites with a social model which they could emulate: a model for the invitation of Asian and Western guests to a gathering in a splendid mansion. Wealthy Asian elites built mansions which rivalled even the residence of the Governors,<sup>263</sup> thus providing these Asians with their own splendid stages where they could choreograph performances in the theatre of prestige by inviting their fellow elites – both Asians and Europeans alike – into their homes to attend social functions. This went on throughout the *entire* colonial era, contrary to the impression given by some history books today.<sup>264</sup>

Government House performed an important social function for the integration and reproduction of the multiracial community of prestige, by serving as a site of social exchanges of symbolic capital, and as a monumental status symbol with which the members of the multiracial elite class could associate themselves and their rituals and

---

*Straits Times*, 23 June 1911, p. 7, R0016518; *Malaya Tribune*, May 20, 1937, p. 10, R0005944; and the personal recollections in: George L. Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, p. 36; J.S.M. Rennie, *Musings of J.S.M.R. Mostly Malayan*, (1933), pp. 61-62; and: Margaret C. Wilson, *Malaya: The Land of Enchantment (1937?)*, p. 115. See also the extract from a farewell address presented to Governor Sir Andrew Clarke in 1875 by prominent Chinese businessmen of Singapore, including Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa and Tan Kim Ching, quoted in: Colonel R.H. Vetch, editor, *Life of Lieut.-General the Hon. Sir Andrew Clarke, G.C.M.G., C.B., C.I.E.*, p. 181.

<sup>263</sup> See: Fred Riley, *A Trip Round the World: Being Jottings Made on a Tour from London to Liverpool, via Africa, Asia, Australia, and America* (1900), quoted in: John Bastin, *Travellers' Singapore: An Anthology*, p. 160. See also the descriptions and photographs of colonial-era mansions in Singapore, many of which were owned by wealthy Asians, in: Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*.

<sup>264</sup> See: C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*, pp. 64, 65, and p. 131; and: Carl A. Trocki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control* (2006), p. 47.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

social interactions. The social functions and rituals that took place at Government House were key institutions and traditions at the centre of the colonial society, and provided conspicuous imagery of the status of the elites as individuals, as well as collectively as a class. By taking part in rituals of elite social interaction and imperial celebrations at Government House, Asian and European elites engaged in a pattern of social exchange and distribution of symbolic capital among themselves. This exchange process involved these elites collectively pooling social resources in Government House as a site symbolising authority and prestige, and then received prestige individually from this *pool* of symbolic capital every time they visited Government House to attend social functions and rituals. This might be compared to a group of people sitting around a campfire; each throws a branch on the fire from time to time to keep it burning, and all receive the benefit of the fire's warmth. Borrowing terminology employed by Marshall Sahlins, this process of social exchange may be described as *pooling*, which created a sense of *centricity* or unity among the Asian and European members of the multiracial colonial elite class – indeed, social exchange and pooling of symbolic resources created their class as a community of prestige, and made it socially real.<sup>265</sup>

### **Images of the Past**

Living in Singapore, one gets the sense that images of the colonial past seem to focus on the lives and activities of poor Asian labourers and wealthy Europeans, with less attention given to wealthy Asians, and little or no attention given to poor Europeans, even though wealthy Asians played important roles in the colonial system, and poor Europeans were certainly present. There is a sense that the prevailing images of the colonial past

---

<sup>265</sup> On the concepts of *centricity* and *pooling*, see: Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, pp. 188-190.

imagine colonial Singapore society as one that was mainly divided by race, rather than appreciating the extent to which it was really divided by class. These class differences were measured in terms of status and prestige as well as material wealth. An appreciation for the importance of the Asian elites in colonial Singapore, as well as the presence of poor Europeans, would tend to undermine the imagery based on racial divisions, while supporting an image based on an appreciation of the factor of class. The class structure of colonial Singapore may be revealed through a study of the types of homes where Asians and Europeans lived.

The distorted image of the past may involve an assumption that colonial-era mansions typically belonged to Europeans,<sup>266</sup> when, in fact, it is almost certain that most of them were the homes of wealthy Asians. If there is some misconception today that colonial-era private mansions were mainly inhabited by Europeans, this could be due to the fact that so many of the privately-owned mansions of wealthy Asians have been demolished and replaced with apartment buildings, while some of the bungalows which were owned by the colonial government (and which housed its officials) are still in existence.<sup>267</sup> Thus, the remaining artefacts of colonial-era elite housing may provide a somewhat misleading image of the past, when, in fact, the official residences of colonial civil servants and military and naval officers were likely dwarfed by the palatial

---

<sup>266</sup> See, for example: Brenda S.A. Yeoh, *Contesting Space: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment in Colonial Singapore*, pp. 45-46 and 48; Chua Beng Huat, "Erased Tropical Heritage: Residential Architecture and Environment," in: Chan Kwok Bun and Tong Chee Kiong, editors, *Past Times: A Social History of Singapore*, pp. 98 and 100; and: Norman Edwards, "The Colonial Suburb: Public Space as Private Space," in: Chua Beng-Huat and Norman Edwards, editors, *Public Space: Design, Use and Management*, pp. 24-39; in this essay, Norman Edwards focused on the mansions of Europeans, and how these mansions displayed the superior colonial social position of these Europeans, and their economic and political separation from the Asians in a plural society here (p. 37); however, one of the illustrations in this essay (Plate 3.4) is a photograph of Panglima Prang, the Western-style mansion of a wealthy local Chinese family. Regarding the history of Panglima Prang, see: Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*, pp. 42 and 154-157.

<sup>267</sup> Chua Beng Huat, "Erased Tropical Heritage: Residential Architecture and Environment," in: Chan Kwok Bun and Tong Chee Kiong, editors, *Past Times: A Social History of Singapore*, p. 99.

mansions of the wealthy Asian colonial elites. During the last three or four decades of the twentieth century especially, the demolition of many of the colonial-era mansions of wealthy Asians of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as Sir Manasseh Meyer's *Belle View* at Oxley Rise (demolished in 1982),<sup>268</sup> Tan Kim Seng's elegant *Panglima Prang* (in 1982)<sup>269</sup> and Eu Tong Sen's palatial *Eu Villa* (in 1980),<sup>270</sup> has meant that much of the physical evidence of Asian economic success, elite status, and ascendancy in the colonial era has been obliterated, making it more difficult for Singaporeans today to appreciate just how wealthy and privileged these outstanding Asian colonial elites really were.

Meanwhile, the remaining shophouses provide some idea of the type of housing where labourers once lived in the congested urban areas.<sup>271</sup> It is, perhaps, not surprising that there is more evidence of the housing of poor Asians than of wealthy Asians, since the population of the former was many times larger than the latter, and so of course the total number of shophouse tenements was far greater than the total number of mansions. Further, the nature of the pattern of inheritance, whereby the mansions of Asian colonial elites were inherited by groups of descendants, may have encouraged the sale of these mansions for high-rise redevelopment, in order to generate a large profit which could be divided among the heirs. However, a picture of colonial society and the residential realities of Asian elites can still be reconstructed from the evidence of surviving documentary records, contemporary written descriptions, and photographs.<sup>272</sup>

---

<sup>268</sup> Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*, p. 233.

<sup>269</sup> Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*, p. 157.

<sup>270</sup> Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*, p. 253.

<sup>271</sup> B.W. Hodder, "Racial Groupings in Singapore," *The Malayan Journal of Tropical Geography*, Volume One (October 1953), p. 31.

<sup>272</sup> For example, see the photographs in: Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

While there may be a postcolonial image of the colonial era which imagines that the distinction between suburban mansions and urban tenements in Singapore was a *racial division*, or even a form of racial *segregation*, with the Europeans living in the mansions and Asians confined to crowded slums, thus stereotyping the Westerners as well-to-do elites and the Asians as impoverished proletarians; such a misconception would deny the existence of both Asian elites and European non-elites on this island in the colonial era.<sup>273</sup> This misconception could be due to the many accounts of the colonial past (in Singapore and elsewhere) which give a great deal of attention to well-to-do Europeans and Asian working-class labourers, with less attention to wealthy Asian elites and little or no attention to impoverished working-class or unemployed Europeans – despite the reality that there certainly were non-wealthy Europeans in colonial Singapore, as well as wealthy Asians.

The little attention – or lack of attention – given to impoverished Europeans in Singapore in some colonial-era accounts could be due to a desire to ignore or hide the presence of non-wealthy and non-respectable Europeans, since their presence could potentially undermine the prestige of the respectable Europeans in the eyes of the Asian masses,<sup>274</sup> coupled with the fact that colonial-era accounts of Singapore were generally written by well-to-do people who were either elites or associated with the elites, and who naturally wished to write accounts that were *about*, and *for*, the members of their own class and ethnic group. These well-to-do Europeans may have considered the presence of poor Europeans to be an embarrassing topic, one which they would rather not write about.

---

<sup>273</sup> A reader might be forgiven for forming such an impression after reading: Brenda S.A. Yeoh, *Contesting Space: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment in Colonial Singapore*, pp. 45-46 and 48.

<sup>274</sup> See: John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya 1880-1941*, p. 223.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

In the decolonising and post-colonial eras, Asian writers naturally used the colonial-era accounts as source material, and thus may have continued the practice of leaving non-elite Europeans out of the picture of the colonial past. Meanwhile, there just might be a tendency for nationalist or post-colonial-era writers to place too much emphasis on the labouring classes, and not enough on Asian elites. Just as colonial-era Europeans were embarrassed by the presence of poor Europeans, some post-colonial-era Asian writers may be a bit embarrassed about the section of the so-called colonised population that was wealthy, that cooperated with the colonial system, and was apparently part of this system. A recognition that the leaders of the Asian population were well-to-do elites who eagerly took part in *their* colonial system, contributing to it and enjoying rich symbolic and material rewards, is a vision which would undermine any conception of the colonial-era Asian population as an entirely *colonised* people, completely united in a sense of being oppressed victims of the system, and poised to begin a heroic nationalist anti-colonial struggle when the time was right. Of course, such a nationalistically-romanticised and essentialised view of colonial society as a revolution in the making, leads to a question: Why did the colonial system last for as long as it did without a revolution?

Part of the answer could be that the labouring masses were not entirely miserable, despite their relative poverty. Their evaluations of their living and working conditions in Singapore must have been based upon comparison with the conditions they had known when they were growing up in their homelands – and, for more of them, their homeland was China. In 1921, sixty-eight percent of Singapore's population was born outside of



Malaya, and even in 1931 more than sixty percent of the people were foreign-born.<sup>275</sup> As for the ethnic Chinese majority, which constituted about three-quarters of the population,<sup>276</sup> seventy-five percent of the Chinese inhabitants of Singapore in 1921 were immigrants who were born outside of Malaya,<sup>277</sup> and of these ethnic Chinese immigrants, almost every one was born in China.<sup>278</sup> To try to understand how these immigrants might have evaluated their living and working conditions in Singapore, we must find a basis of comparison between Singapore and China.

There may well be no better index of the relative well-being of Chinese immigrant labourers than the difference between their diet in China versus their diet after their arrival in Singapore. The need for nutrition is the most basic need of human beings; when people suffer from starvation, they are dominated by the basic physiological need for food, and their hunger can become their overriding motivation.<sup>279</sup> During Singapore's colonial era, China experienced times of famine and starvation.<sup>280</sup> Yen Ching-hwang has identified over-population, land and food shortages, natural disasters, and warfare, as well as exploitation by landlords, moneylenders, mandarins, and tax collectors, as important push factors which impelled many Chinese peasants to overcome their reluctance to emigrate, break free from their social connections and Confucian tradition, and migrate overseas; meanwhile, their perception of economic opportunities abroad

---

<sup>275</sup> C.A. Vlieland, *British Malaya ... A Report on the 1931 Census and on Certain Problems of Vital Statistics*, table p. 68.

<sup>276</sup> *A Handbook Of Information Presented By The Rotary Club And The Municipal Commissioners Of The Town Of Singapore* (1933), p. 15.

<sup>277</sup> Vlieland, table on p. 69.

<sup>278</sup> Vlieland, p. 70, paragraph number 248.

<sup>279</sup> A.H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," in: Jay M. Shafritz and Albert C. Hyde, editors, *Classics of Public Administration*, p. 131.

<sup>280</sup> Regarding famines in China, see, for example: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, p. 13; *Straits Times*, 9 February 1889, p. 3; Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, p. 1; 13 February 1889, Supplement page; 16 February 1889, p. 2; 27 February 1889, p. 3; 8 March 1889, p. 2; 15 June 1889, p. 2, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016441; and: *Malaya Tribune*, 18 May 1937, p. 12, R0005944.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

constituted significant pull factors.<sup>281</sup> The push factors may have been the most compelling; the 1921 Malayan census report noted that poor harvests in Southern China always swelled the flow of Chinese immigration to Malaya, regardless of the prevailing conditions there.<sup>282</sup>

Even in the best of times, the ordinary diet of Chinese peasants was quite meagre. N.I. Low, who was born into a Chinese peasant household and migrated to Singapore in the early twentieth century, recalled that his family's staple diet consisted of unpolished rice, vegetables, tubers, bamboo shoots, and cheap salted fish, with occasional meals of snails and mice. He rarely ate poultry or eggs, and he looked forward to receiving two hard-boiled duck's eggs on his birthday. Dog meat was prized, but Low could not remember tasting it. His family ate very little pork and only rarely, during important festivals.<sup>283</sup>

In contrast with the diet of peasants in China, Chinese immigrant labourers in Singapore could afford to feast on pork and rice every day. In the early twentieth century, Yeo Tiam Siew used to watch the Boat Quay workers congregating before sunrise at a shop in Chinatown, on the corner of Synagogue Street and Pickering Street, where they ordered their standard breakfast of greasy *bak kut* or pork ribs, served with freshly baked buns and bowls of Chinese tea. After finishing their breakfast, the workers walked to the nearby Boat Quay, where they proceeded to unload sacks of rice from the *tongkangs* that awaited them on the Singapore River, riding at their moorings alongside the Quay. Yeo Tiam Siew's vivid description of their work indicated that these labourers

---

<sup>281</sup> Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya*, pp. 1-4 and 317.

<sup>282</sup> J.E. Nathan, *The Census of British Malaya ... 1921*, p. 22.

<sup>283</sup> Low Ngiong Ing, *Recollections: Chinese Jetsam on a Tropic Shore: When Singapore was Syonan-to*, pp. 2 and 22-27. Regarding the diet of Chinese peasants, see also: Chan Kwok Bun and Claire Chiang See Ngoh, *Stepping Out: The Making of Chinese Entrepreneurs*, pp. 49 and 131.

needed their substantial morning meal to give them the strength they required to carry the heavy gunnysacks filled with rice from the *tongkangs*, over gangplanks to the Quay, where they put them onto bullock carts.<sup>284</sup>

According to George Peet, Chinese labourers in Singapore enjoyed a relatively balanced diet; he described the sort of meal they could afford to buy from stalls in the street as a bowl of rice with a piece of pork and some green vegetables. He described the rickshaw puller he hired on contract as obviously well-nourished, and looking as fit or fitter than his employer. Peet also disputed the notion that rickshaw pullers had short careers, recalling that he recognised the same pullers outside his office building for at least a decade, apparently healthy and vigorous.<sup>285</sup>

Of course, his is not to say that all immigrant labourers found a life of relative health and well-being in Singapore. James Francis Warren has eloquently recounted the story of the Singapore rickshaw pullers in his book *Rickshaw Coolie*, having recovered their past by means of historical research. Many of them became addicted to opium, which was sold to them by Chinese merchants, with the support of the colonial government; the labourer's addiction provided great profits to both the Chinese opium merchants and the colonial state.<sup>286</sup> Still, it seems that, for many labourers, if life in Singapore was no utopia, neither was it a hell. For many working-class immigrants from China, life in Singapore compared favourably with the lives they left behind, by the simple yet compelling measurement of a much better diet, which featured regular helpings of pork. Their lives as labourers in Singapore may have seemed relatively

---

<sup>284</sup> Yeo Tiam Siew, *Destined to Survive: The Story of My Life*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>285</sup> George L. Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, p. 71.

<sup>286</sup> Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, pp. 222-233; Carl A Trocki, *Opium and Empire: Chinese Society in Colonial Singapore, 1800 – 1910*.

satisfactory to them, for the simple reason that the life they had known in China was so miserable and hungry.

To try to understand how the workers may have felt about their situation, it is important to try to apply what may have been their standards of measurement. It seems likely that the availability of food – especially pork – was probably an important factor in how these labourers evaluated their new situation in Singapore. For them, a little pork each day, with rice or a bun, was like a feast – it was the type of food that, in China, they might only have enjoyed rarely, during special celebrations. The fact that Chinese immigrants kept flocking to Singapore year after year to work as labourers could indicate that Singapore had a reputation for being a better place for a labourer to live and work than in China, and that these immigrants were, in effect, voting with their feet, choosing colonial Singapore over their own homeland.<sup>287</sup>

If many of the immigrant labourers believed that they were better off than they had been in their homeland, thanks in part to their improved diet, this may help to explain why the attitude of the working-class immigrant masses in colonial Singapore seems to have been characterised by *compliance* to the authority structures they encountered – structures of authority and control that involved wealthy Chinese *towkays* as well as the colonial government. If the compliance of the immigrant labourers was based in part on their perception that their living standards had improved somewhat subsequent to their arrival in Singapore, another factor in their compliance may have been that the recognised leaders of the Chinese community – or, rather, the different dialect-speaking

---

<sup>287</sup> Rhoads Murphey mentioned Asians voting with their feet by migrating to colonial ports. See: Rhoads Murphey, “On the Evolution of the Port City,” in *Brides of the Sea: Port Cities of Asia from the 16<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, edited by Frank Broeze, p. 238. See also: Ian Copland, *The Burden of Empire: Perspectives on Imperialism and Colonialism*, p. 86.

### *Scenes of Prestige*

sections of the Chinese population – were wealthy Chinese businessmen who were stakeholders and partners in the colonial system. These Chinese colonial elites were socially integrated with their Asian and European fellow elites within the social context of a generally compliant population, one that was largely comprised of immigrant labourers who were accustomed to a much lower standard of living in their own homeland.

Even if any of the immigrant labourers wished to oppose the colonial system, to do so would involve not only going against the colonial state, but also the leaders of the Chinese community, who were clearly on the side of the colonial side – indeed, they were fully incorporated into it. In the event that any of the immigrant labourers experienced pent-up frustrations, it was easier for them to seek release in street battles with their fellow immigrants of different clans or secret societies, than to go up against the combined forces of the colonial state and the Chinese community leaders. It may be that these secret society street battles functioned as safety valves which channelled the frustrations and aggression of Chinese immigrant labourers into forms of violence which threatened neither the interests of the Chinese business and community elites, nor the interests of their allies, their fellow business elites (other Asians and Europeans) and the colonial state itself. Alternatively, immigrant labourers could choose to escape from their frustrations by smoking opium. Many labourers became addicted to this drug, and their addiction not only did not threaten the status quo, but it actually contributed it, by suppressing the urge and the will to take action (if such urge existed in the first place), and by further enriching both the wealthy Chinese opium merchants, as well as providing

a very significant source of revenue (sometimes the major source) to support the colonial state.

### **Class Division and Residential Patterns**

Having considered possible factors behind the compliance of the labouring masses who comprised the wider audience of the colonial theatre of prestige, the following pages will consider two categories which have, perhaps, not been given as much attention as they deserve: the wealthy Asian elites, and the poor and non-elite Europeans. Although the labouring-class people of colonial Singapore were overwhelmingly Asians, there were some impoverished Europeans in colonial Singapore in the nineteenth century. For example, in an account written in 1864, John Cameron described a destitute Australian who was unable to find work in Singapore, and lived in miserable lodgings in a shop that sold arrack or toddy.<sup>288</sup> George Peet recalled that the European shop assistants who worked in the fashionable department stores in the 1920s (namely, John Little's, Robinson's, and Whiteaway Laidlaw's) were paid so little that they could only afford to live in *squalid* accommodations.<sup>289</sup> There were also Western tramps and beachcombers in Singapore around this time; a pair of Englishmen even found work shining the shoes of the Chinese residents.<sup>290</sup>

---

<sup>288</sup> Regarding European labourers in Singapore *circa* 1864, see: John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India*, pp. 281-285. See also the description of impoverished Australians, Americans, and Europeans in Singapore in the 1860s, in: C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*, pp. 63-64; and: C.M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements 1826-67: Indian Presidency to Crown Colony*, pp. 221-222.

<sup>289</sup> George Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, p. 193.

<sup>290</sup> See also the description of Western beachcombers, shoe-shining Englishmen, and tramps, in Singapore in the early 1920s by Harry L. Foster, reprinted in: *Travellers' Tales of Old Singapore*, compiled by Michael Wise with Mun Him Wise, pp. 194-199. See also: John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya 1880-1941*, p. 128.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

At the opposite end of the housing spectrum from the mansions of wealthy Asians and Europeans, there were not only the tenements of Asian labourers – there were also the humble dwellings of non-elite Europeans. Just as mansions proclaimed the elite status of their Asian and European inhabitants, so too did boarding houses and seedy hotels proclaim the lack of elite status of the people who stayed there. The existence of taverns and punch-houses that we kept by Europeans might also be an indication of the presence of non-elite Europeans, such as the sailors who would be expected to visit this port. A list of the ninety-four European inhabitants of Singapore in March 1827 shows three constables, two punch-house keepers and one tavern keeper.<sup>291</sup> While constables and successful keepers of punch-houses and taverns might be able to earn a decent living, it seems unlikely that they could be counted among the elites, and thus their listed employments indicate the presence of non-elite Europeans in the local population.

John Francis, who was the only tavern keeper in this 1827 list, opened his tavern and hotel in Singapore in 1823, in Tavern Street, a short street that may have been named in his establishment's honour, between the then newly-reclaimed Boat Quay and Commercial Square, the future Raffles Place.<sup>292</sup> John Francis eventually started a butcher's shop in Telok Ayer Street in 1840.<sup>293</sup> His occupations of tavern and hotel keeper, and butcher shop owner, suggest that, while John Francis could have been a prosperous middle-class businessman, he was probably *not* a wealthy, high-status business elite. It might say something about the perceived respectability (or lack of respectability) of taverns in the local social context that, in 1858, the Municipal

---

<sup>291</sup> C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, pp. 202-203.

<sup>292</sup> See C.A. Gibson-Hill's critical review of Buckley's *Anecdotal History*, in: *The Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume 27, Part I (1954), p. 240.

<sup>293</sup> Buckley, p. 224.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

Commissioners changed the name of Tavern Street to Bonham Street, at the same time that they dignified Commercial Square with the new name of Raffles Place.<sup>294</sup>

By 1878, there was a cluster of at least four taverns catering to sailors, conveniently located along the road from the harbour into town,<sup>295</sup> which suggests that there was a sufficiently numerous clientele base of seafarers who sailed before the mast to patronise these worthy establishments. As to what sort of beverages may have been served to these thirsty seafarers, the local press reported in 1845 that the keeper of the Union Hotel, one W.H. Miles, had purchased a cask of second-rate brandy that turned out to be something else entirely – according to one expert, it was really a mixture of sugar, arrack, and tobacco. W.H. Miles took prompt legal action, which resulted in the man who sold him the cask being fined one thousand rupees.<sup>296</sup> However, the fact that a local merchant would even attempt to sell such a spurious concoction to a hotel keeper suggests that other hotel keepers and bartenders may not have been as particular as W.H. Miles. This episode also suggests what sort of consumers of alcoholic beverages were available for low-quality liquor: they were probably seafarers who were not too discriminating in their taste for liquor. Anyway, seafarers who were already three sheets to the wind may not have noticed the difference between brandy and the tobacco-flavoured beverage.

Meanwhile, accommodations appropriate for non-elite Europeans began to make their appearance. Stephen Hallpike opened a boarding house next to his blacksmith's shop and shipyard, between High Street and the Singapore River, in May 1831. He also

---

<sup>294</sup> Buckley, p. 667.

<sup>295</sup> William T. Hornaday, *Two Years in the Jungle: The Experiences of a Hunter and Naturalist in India, Ceylon, the Malay Peninsula and Borneo* (1885), reprinted in part, with an Introduction by J.M. Gullick, as: *The Experiences of a Hunter and Naturalist in the Malay Peninsula and Borneo* (1993), p. 3.

<sup>296</sup> Buckley, p. 429, quoting the *Singapore Free Press*, June 1845.



offered the public a carriage repair service at the same site.<sup>297</sup> Hallpike's boarding house is an early example of housing that was available for non-wealthy Europeans, the type of people who would choose to stay in a boarding house at the site of a blacksmith's shop, shipyard, and carriage-repair establishment.

Three murders which occurred in the same building suggest the presence of non-elite Europeans in Singapore – the sort of people whose names may not normally find their way into the press. In 1918, Sally Liebmann, a Russian Jewish immigrant who owned the Globe Hotel in North Bridge Road, was murdered by a servant, along with a lodger by the name of Landau. Strangely enough, Sally Liebmann was the third Russian Jewish woman to be killed in that building; the other victims were keepers of coffee-shops there. The first murder victim, Sally Rosenberg, was strangled and bludgeoned there in 1887, and her remains were not discovered until some time later, when the neighbours noticed the odour of decomposition. When Sigismund Grabowski was tried and convicted for Sally Rosenberg's murder, it was suggested that the building might be cursed. The second victim was also strangled, in or about 1895, and her remains were also not discovered until several days had passed.<sup>298</sup>

Certain types of hotels likely provided economical accommodation for people of limited means. When George Peet, who arrived in Singapore in 1923, visited G.D. Coleman's old mansion in Coleman Street, he found that it had degenerated into a very *seedy* hotel. He also noted that the Europeans who worked as assistants in the local department stores earned so little money that they could only afford to live in boarding

---

<sup>297</sup> Buckley, p. 215.

<sup>298</sup> Dato Sir Roland St. John Braddell, "Crime: Its Punishment and Prevention," in: Makepeace et al., eds., *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume One, pp. 266-267. See also: *Straits Times*, 30 August 1918, p. 11; 5 September 1918, p. 8; 6 September 1918, p. 8; 10 September 1918, p. 8; 1 October 1918, p. 7; 3 October 1918, p. 8; and 7 October 1918, p. 10.

houses that were cheap and *squalid*. Fortunately for Peet, he was able to afford to dwell in a respectable boarding house in Cavenagh Road, though even this accommodation was hardly luxurious: he compared his narrow bedroom to a cubicle, and the sanitary arrangements were primitive and disgusting, with a dozen lodgers sharing a *jamban* – a bucket which was emptied once a day. Peet believed that this system was used in all boarding houses at that time.<sup>299</sup> Besides boarding houses, another economical housing option for European bachelors was to share a house with a few others in an arrangement known as a *chummery* or *mess*.<sup>300</sup> The presence of low-end housing for Europeans – seedy hotels and squalid boarding houses, as well as chummeries and messes – indicated the presence of Europeans who were neither elites nor wealthy. It would be as wrong to assume that all Europeans in colonial Singapore enjoyed spacious quarters in palatial mansions, as it would be to assume that all Asians here were immigrant labourers.

The European prostitutes who worked in brothels in the Malay Street area before World War One comprised another category of non-elite Europeans in Singapore in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to John Butcher, prostitutes from southern, central, and eastern regions of Europe were living in eight brothels in Singapore in 1905. However, the authorities did not allow British prostitutes in Singapore, since this was viewed as highly detrimental to British prestige, especially in a colonial setting, where British people were expected to conform to a respectable standard of behaviour.<sup>301</sup> Besides brothels that offered European women to their patrons, there was also at least one hotel that was reportedly known as a venue for assignations with

---

<sup>299</sup> George L. Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, pp. 23, 43-62, 129, 193.

<sup>300</sup> Arnold Wright and Thomas H. Reid, *The Malay Peninsula: A Record of British Progress in the Middle East* (1912), p. 227; Charles Allen, editor, *Tales From The South China Seas*, p. 55; Lionel Griffith-Jones, *That's My Lot: An Anecdotal Autobiography of a British Ex-Singapore Colonial*, pp. 37-38

<sup>301</sup> John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya 1880-1941*, pp. 196-197.

European women.<sup>302</sup> It would seem that not all of the European inhabitants of colonial Singapore were respectable or high-status individuals, contrary, perhaps, to today's image of colonial society, an image in which all the Europeans may be portrayed as wealthy.

### **Sumptuous Mansions: Socio-Economic Status Symbols *Par Excellence***

Having discussed the presence and conditions of low-status Europeans and Asian (especially Chinese) immigrant labourers in colonial Singapore, the following pages will deal with high-status Asians, and, to some extent, with their European fellow elites as well. The evidence of the colonial-era built environment helps to reveal the role of Asian elites in the social structure, and how their role was expressed in residential patterns. Along with mass-level compliance, another factor in the continuity and general stability of the colonial system in Singapore, and one which helps to explain why there was no anti-colonial revolution here, could lie in the fact that there was among the Asian population a category of well-to-do Asians (including the recognised leaders within the Asian community) who were stakeholders and partners in the colonial system. This conclusion is supported by evidence from the residential pattern, which do not conform to an image of racial segregation. Instead, the residential pattern actually exhibited a *class division*, with wealthy Asians and Europeans alike living in suburban mansions in the same suburbs, and less-fortunate Asians living in urban tenements and rural villages, not because they were Asians, but because they were poor, or, at least, not wealthy.<sup>303</sup>

---

<sup>302</sup> Charles Allen, editor, *Tales From The South China Seas*, p. 52.

<sup>303</sup> See the discussion of class groupings in areas outside the congested core of the city, in: B.W. Hodder, "Racial Groupings in Singapore," *The Malayan Journal of Tropical Geography*, Volume One (October 1953), p. 29.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

Labourers needed to find the most inexpensive housing available, as close as possible to their workplaces, since they most likely had to walk. By contrast, Asian and European elites alike enjoyed access to vehicular transportation – carriages, rickshaws, and automobiles – which allowed them to live in suburbs that were increasingly removed from the congested town area with the passage of time. Moreover, they could afford to build large homes, and hire staffs of domestic servants to maintain them.

The colonial built environment provided evidence that the high-status category of the population included both Asians and Europeans, and this evidence is consistent with the existence of a multiracial elite class or community of prestige. Moreover, the prestigious elements of the built environment functioned as some of the most important status symbols, by means of which Asian and European elites asserted their membership together in the elite class. The most significant division within the population was the class division between the multiracial elite class and the multiracial masses, rather than racial divisions.

Asian and European elites alike lived in sumptuous mansions, some of which were quite grand, and even palatial. These impressive homes proclaimed the elite status of their residents; indeed, a mansion might be regarded as the socio-economic status symbol *par excellence*. The neighbourhood settings and architectural styles of these elite homes varied. Some mansions were townhouses, while others were located outside of town, on hilltops, on plantations, and along the seashore. Their architectural styles included traditional Chinese, Peranakan, neoclassical or Palladian, Second Empire, Victorian, Edwardian Baroque, and Art Deco, as well as the local black-and-white bungalow style.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

But whatever their architectural style, all of these mansions had certain characteristics in common: they all served as highly conspicuous status symbols for their elite owners, and they all provided venues which could be used for social interaction among Asian and European elites<sup>304</sup> – they were stages in the theatre of prestige where elites cultivated social connections amongst themselves by exchanging symbolic capital through honouring one another by the giving and receiving of invitations and by their association together in these prestigious social gatherings. The possession by wealthy Asian elites of imposing mansions, as conspicuous status symbols *par excellence*, visually and symbolically located Asian elites at the summit of the colonial society, and united them with European elites in a fellowship of prestige.

Elites used their mansions to exchange symbolic capital and cultivate social capital, by honouring one another with invitations to receptions in their homes.<sup>305</sup> The tradition of the staging of elite social functions in private mansions was in itself an important institution of the multiracial elite class, an institution in which the elites invested considerable symbolic capital. The successful acquisition and control of the outward signs of cultural capital, as well as economic capital, *objectified* in mansions,<sup>306</sup> all functioned as status symbols, which qualified Asian colonial elites and their Western

---

<sup>304</sup> For examples of social functions at the homes of Asian elites, including European guests, see the descriptions of social events at the homes of: Choa Chong Long (*Singapore Chronicle*, 9 June 1831, p. 3, R0009223), Tan Seng Poh (*Straits Times*, 26 August 1876, p. 1, R0016425), Seah Liang Seah (in 1895 – see: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 284-285), Choa Kim Keat (in 1895 – Song, pp. 289-290, and in 1905 – Song, p. 290), Tan Kheam Hock (in 1915 – Song, p. 258); Tuan Syed Ibrahim Omar Alsagoff (*Malaya Tribune*, 25 May 1937, p. 14, R0005944); and: Tan Chong Chew (*Malaya Tribune*, 30 June 1937, p. 9, R0005945). See also the report on an Arab wedding with European guests at a private home in East Coast Road, in: *Straits Times*, 31 January 1923, p. 10, R0016599. See the mention of these sorts of events and their significance, in: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, p. 13.

<sup>305</sup> Regarding receptions, see: Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship (Les Structures Élémentaires de la Parenté)*, Chapter Five, “The Principle of Reciprocity” (“Le Principe de Reciprocité”), p. 57.

<sup>306</sup> Regarding *objectified cultural capital*, see: Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” in: John G. Richardson, editor, *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, p. 243.

fellow elites for membership in the colonial elite class. By commissioning the construction of mansions in architectural styles which were fashionable in the West, Asian elites participated successfully in the cultural system of European elites, much as they also took part just as successfully in the same economic and symbolic systems as their Western fellow elites.

Wealthy Asians and Europeans alike could afford to live outside the city centre, in grand suburban homes surrounded by luxurious gardens, in hilltop mansions with commanding vistas, or in seaside villas facing sandy beaches, and ride to their offices in forms of transportation which were also important status symbols,<sup>307</sup> including carriages,<sup>308</sup> rickshaws,<sup>309</sup> or automobiles.<sup>310</sup> In 1884, Governor Sir Frederick Weld mentioned the bungalows where wealthy Arabs and Chinese lived near the town of Singapore.<sup>311</sup> In 1885, the *Straits Times* claimed that most of the attractive hills and plantations outside the town, including the best sites for country houses, were owned by

---

<sup>307</sup> Roxana Waterson, "Gathering Speed: Transport and the Pace of Life," in: Chan Kwok Bun and Tong Chee Kiong, editors, *Past Times: A Social History of Singapore*, pp. 107-111 and 116-117; note the photographs of Chinese and Arab elites in their fine automobiles on pp. 116 and 117.

<sup>308</sup> See the first-hand accounts of the carriages of Chinese in Singapore by some of the European visitors to Singapore in John Bastin's *Travellers' Singapore: An Anthology*, namely: Frederick William Burbidge (1877), p. 121; William T. Hornaday (1878), p. 125; Mary Macfarlane Park (1901), p. 168; and Ethel Colquhoun (1901), p. 171. See also: John Thomson, *The Straits of Malacca Indo-China and China or Ten Years' Travels, Adventures and Residence Abroad* (1875), reprinted in part as: *The Straits of Malacca, Siam and Indo-China*, pp. 57-58.

<sup>309</sup> Regarding rickshaws with Asian and European passengers, see the first-hand accounts in: Charlotte Cameron, *Wanderings in South-Eastern Seas* (1924), p. 15, and: George L. Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, p. 68.

<sup>310</sup> Regarding the automobiles of prosperous Asians, see: Arnold Wright and Thomas H. Reid, *The Malay Peninsula*, (1912), p. 221; Arnold Wright and H.A. Cartwright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya* (1908), p. 702; and Richard Curle, *Into the East* (1923), pp. 129-130. See Lord Northcliffe's comment on the automobiles of the Chinese in Singapore in 1921, in: Alfred Viscount Northcliffe, *My Journey Round the World*, pp. 161 and 163, quoted in: John Bastin, *Travellers' Singapore*, p. 193 and 195.

<sup>311</sup> Sir Frederick A. Weld, "The Straits Settlements and British Malaya," A paper presented to the Royal Colonial Institute on 10 June 1884, in: Paul H. Kratoska, editor, *Honourable Intentions: Talks on the British Empire in South-East Asia delivered at the Royal Colonial Institute 1874-1928*, p. 48.

Chinese, who spent their weekends and holidays there with their families, and interred their deceased family members there in private burial grounds.<sup>312</sup>

Although Singapore's palatial Government House may have been mentioned in the local press and other publications more often than any other mansion from 1869 to 1959, a visitor to Singapore in 1899 suggested that the Governor's palace was actually surpassed in grandeur by the mansions of wealthy local Chinese.<sup>313</sup> European elites certainly had no monopoly on the ownership of mansions in Singapore in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; indeed, many of the largest and most splendid mansions here were owned by wealthy Asians.<sup>314</sup> This should be no surprise, considering the great economic success enjoyed throughout the colonial era by the leading Asian business elites; indeed, the grandeur of the mansions of wealthy Asians reflected the central importance of these Asian colonial elites as some of the leading stakeholders within the colonial system. Still, there may be a tendency to assume that, because Singapore was a *European* colonial settlement, therefore the Europeans would presumably control the most desirable status symbols. This tendency is suggested by the published comments of Western visitors such as Rudyard Kipling, who evidently felt that the extent to which the island belonged to the Chinese in 1889 was noteworthy and of interest to his readers.<sup>315</sup>

Rudyard Kipling was not the only European visitor who to be surprised by the prominence of Asian elites in colonial Singapore. When Lord Northcliffe visited

---

<sup>312</sup> *Straits Times*, 16 May 1885, p. 2, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016433.

<sup>313</sup> Fred Riley, *A Trip Round the World: Being Jottings Made on a Tour from London to Liverpool, via Africa, Asia, Australia, and America* (1900), quoted in: John Bastin, *Travellers' Singapore: An Anthology*, p. 160.

<sup>314</sup> See the descriptions and photographs of colonial-era mansions in Singapore, many of which were owned by wealthy Asians, in: Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*.

<sup>315</sup> Rudyard Kipling, *From Sea to Sea*, No. V. E-text at: <http://whitewolf.newcastle.edu.au/words/authors/K/KiplingRudyard/prose/FromSeaToS...> (Accessed April 5, 2006.) Dr. Julian Davison kindly brought this passage to my attention.

Singapore in 1921, he was astonished to learn that, while his fellow English compatriots lived in modest dwellings, some of the local Chinese resided in palatial homes and drove the finest automobiles.<sup>316</sup> The fact that European visitors were apparently surprised by the relative economic success of Asian elites, as objectified by their ownership of status symbols, suggests that what these Western visitors observed here challenged prevailing images of so-called European colonialism. In 1919, there were only two Rolls-Royce cars registered in Singapore, and both belonged to Chinese owners: Tan Wi Yan and Low Cheng Phuan.<sup>317</sup> The fact that Asians owned the only examples of this premier high-status automobile that were registered on this island in 1919 is symbolic of the status of Asian elites as leading stakeholders and beneficiaries of the colonial system in this supposedly Western colonial settlement. The success of Asian elites in acquiring wealth and status symbols in colonial Singapore leads to a reconsideration of the supposed *European-ness* of the colonial system here. If many of the colonial status symbols belonged to Asian colonial elites, then perhaps the colonial system itself belonged to them as well, as much as it belonged to the Western elites – in other words, the colonial system was Asian as well as European.

There can be no more conspicuous symbol of wealth than the ownership of a palatial mansion in a prominent location. Such mansions were the homes of several prominent local elites. One of the most notable hilltop mansions in colonial Singapore was Tyersall Palace, the Singapore residence of Sultan Abu Bakar of Johore near the Botanic Gardens, which was formally opened with a multiracial social gathering of Asian

---

<sup>316</sup> See: Lord Northcliffe's diary entry for 30 November 1921, published in: Alfred Viscount Northcliffe, *My Journey Round the World (16 July 1921 – 26 Feb. 1922)*, p. 161. Lord Northcliffe's account is also quoted in: John Bastin, *Travellers' Singapore: An Anthology*, p. 193.

<sup>317</sup> See the list of registered motorcars, in: *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, 11 April 1919, pp. 497-530; the Rolls-Royce cars of Tan Wi Yan and Low Cheng Phuan are listed on pp. 505 and 512 respectively.



### *Scenes of Prestige*

and European elites in 1892.<sup>318</sup> Another example was Eu Villa, Eu Tong Sen's palace at Adis Road on Mount Sophia,<sup>319</sup> a hill which was named after Lady Raffles,<sup>320</sup> the second wife of the founder of the Settlement of Singapore. Eu Villa replaced another palace called Adis Lodge, which was the splendid home of the wealthy Jewish businessman Nissim Nissim Adis, who was born in Howrah, India, and immigrated to Singapore in 1893, where he traded in stocks, bought properties, and built the Grand Hotel de l'Europe on the site of William Farquhar's Residency House, facing the Padang. Adis Lodge on Mount Sophia was completed in 1907 at a cost of nearly \$300,000, and it was still almost new when the site underwent redevelopment to create Eu Villa.<sup>321</sup> This grandiose palace symbolised the vast wealth of Eu Tong Sen, an Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (or OBE), whose fortune was derived from lucrative tin mines in Malaya.

The nature of the colonial system that prevailed on this island was epitomised by the appropriation of Mount Sophia for conspicuous consumption by wealthy Asian elites. This was the hill where Stamford's sister, Maryanne Flint, and her husband, Captain William Flint, made their home in 1823, and they were supposedly responsible for naming the hill in honour of Sophia Raffles.<sup>322</sup> This site became, in effect, the grand podium upon which stood the grandiose palaces of two Asian millionaires, one after the other, and from which their owners could gaze out upon the surrounding town – and

---

<sup>318</sup> Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*, pp. 52 and 174-175.

<sup>319</sup> Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*, pp. 208-209.

<sup>320</sup> Capt. H.F. Pearson, "Singapore from the Sea, June 1823. Notes on a Recently Discovered Sketch attributed to Lt. Phillip Jackson," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume 26, Part I (July 1953), p. 50.

<sup>321</sup> Regarding N.N. Adis and Adis Lodge, see: Wright, Arnold, and H.A. Cartwright, editors. *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya*, (1908), NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0028717, pp. 629-631; and: Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*, p. 187.

<sup>322</sup> Capt. H.F. Pearson, "Singapore from the Sea, June 1823. Notes on a Recently Discovered Sketch attributed to Lt. Phillip Jackson," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume 26, Part I, July 1953, p. 50. See also: Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*, p. 208.

especially the mansions of other, less wealthy individuals – with, we may easily imagine, a sense of superiority and pride in the highly conspicuous enjoyment of the luxurious accommodations and prestigious address which their money could buy.

Adis Lodge and Eu Villa clearly proclaimed the vast wealth and elite social status of their owners, while appropriating a location which was associated with the European founder of the Settlement. What better or more conspicuous status symbol could there be than a palace on a hill, towering above other mansions in a prestigious locality? These palatial mansions were status symbols *par excellence*. Eu Villa was completed in 1915 at a cost of at least one million dollars.<sup>323</sup> Could any European private mansion in colonial Singapore compare with the splendour and grandeur of the Eu Tong Sen's ostentatious palace? The size of this house clearly qualified it as a prime venue for social functions, and Eu Tong Sen evidently used his mansion for entertaining guests; the British traveller Charlotte Cameron was quite impressed with the splendour of Eu Tong Sen's house, when she attended a social function there *circa* 1923.<sup>324</sup> Eu Villa effectively displayed the economic success and social prominence of its owner, such that even a visitor to Singapore could be suitably impressed.<sup>325</sup> Unfortunately, Eu Villa was demolished in 1980,<sup>326</sup> thus depriving Singapore of what must have been one of the most lavish examples of the type of mansion that a leading Chinese businessman could afford.

There may be a tendency to assume that Europeans in colonial settings enjoyed higher standards of living than the non-Europeans, and that the non-Europeans were

---

<sup>323</sup> The price of Eu Villa is mentioned in: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 332.

<sup>324</sup> Charlotte Cameron, *Wanderings in South-Eastern Seas* (1924), p. 34.

<sup>325</sup> For an anecdote which may actually refer to Eu Tong Sen, see the excerpt from: Harry L. Foster, *A Beachcomber in the Orient* (New York, 1923), reprinted in: *Travellers' Tales of Old Singapore*, compiled by Michael Wise with Mun Him Wise, pp. 197-198.

<sup>326</sup> Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*, p. 253.

somehow racially excluded from these superior European colonial standards of living.<sup>327</sup> Perhaps there were some colonies somewhere else where this was true. However, in colonial Singapore at least, elite Asians were certainly not excluded from enjoying a material standard of living equal to, or even far surpassing, the material standard of living of the local European elites. In fact, in terms of conspicuous status symbols, such as mansions, carriages, automobiles, exclusive clubs, and grand social functions, it is clear from the documentary evidence that Asian elites often equalled, and frequently excelled, the sumptuous levels of material standards of living enjoyed by European elites, thus emphasising the social proximity of Asian elites to their Western fellow elites, rather than the social distance between them.

In colonial Singapore at least, opulent material standards of living actually helped to bring Asian elites and European elites together in the same region of social space, and reflected their location together in the same economic stratum at the apex of the colonial system here, rather than separating these Asian and European elites from one another or creating barriers along racial or ethnic lines. Instead, the distinction was clearly along class lines, with privileged Asian and European elites on one side, as elite insiders, and everybody else on the other side, as non-elite outsiders. Elite Asians and elite Europeans likely shared more in common with one another than they did with the non-elite members of their own ethnic categories. The shared enjoyment of superior lifestyles and conspicuous consumption of status symbols by Asian and European elites cultivated the public representation of their fellow membership within the same elite class or

---

<sup>327</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, "Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Volume 31, Number 1 (January 1989), p. 141.

community of prestige, at the centre of the colonial society, and made it very easy for them to recognise one another as fellow elites.

The residential space of colonial Singapore was clearly divided more by wealth, or economic class, than by race; and it was wealth and economic class identity, rather than racial identity, which was displayed and symbolised by the residential distribution, and the distinctive homes and suburbs of those who belonged to the multiracial colonial elite class. Thanks to their mansions, European and Asian elites shared the experience of the enjoyment of tropical suburban living, a gracious lifestyle and a distinctive form of consumption, which only a fraction of the population could afford. Instead of segregating the elites along racial lines, the acquisition and display of these eminently conspicuous residential status symbols helped to place Asian and European elites in the same social category, and thus fostered their mutual recognition of shared elite status and their social commingling and affiliation as a social class. Asian and Western elites could easily recognise one another's shared elite status due to the fact that they lived in superior houses in fashionable neighbourhoods, and they could rank each other within the elite class by noting the relative size and opulence of their mansions.

Asian elites and European elites were clearly not residentially segregated from one another in colonial Singapore, contrary to what some people may believe today<sup>328</sup> – there was nothing here to compare with the Peak District in Hong Kong, an exclusive

---

<sup>328</sup> There may be a tendency to highlight or overemphasize the segregation of different races in different areas of Singapore, and to assume that the spatial arrangement of the Singapore cityscape conformed to a Furnivallian plural society model, characterised by racial segregation. See the mentions of (spatial) *segregation* in: Norman Edwards, "The Colonial Suburb: Public Space as Private Space," in: Chua Beng-Huat and Norman Edwards, editors, *Public Space: Design, Use and Management*, pp. 25, 34, and 37.

neighbourhood which was set apart for European elites there.<sup>329</sup> On the contrary, in the colonial era, elite Asians lived in the same suburbs in Singapore as their European fellow elites<sup>330</sup> (as they still do today) – in such prestigious localities as Tanglin,<sup>331</sup> Thomson Road,<sup>332</sup> Bukit Timah Road,<sup>333</sup> Dalvey Road,<sup>334</sup> and Dunearn Road,<sup>335</sup> and by the sea at Tanjong Katong<sup>336</sup> and Pasir Panjang.<sup>337</sup> This mixture of the homes of Asian elites and European elites in the same neighbourhoods was consistent with the plans for the town which were drawn up by Raffles in 1822: Raffles decreed that the area from Bras Basah Road to the Sultan's residence in Kampong Glam and extending inland across the Rochor

---

<sup>329</sup> Regarding the Peak District in Hong Kong, see: John M. Carroll, *Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonialists in Hong Kong*, pp. 90-96. I am grateful to NUS Central Library Senior Librarian Tim Yap Fuan for kindly bringing this book to my attention.

<sup>330</sup> See: Sir George Maxwell *et al.*, *The Civil Defence of Malaya*, p. 59, and: Ambrose Pratt, *Magical Malaya* (1931), p. 20.

<sup>331</sup> Tanglin: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 390, describing G.E. Raine's article in the *London Daily Mail* (in 1906?); and: Margaret C. Wilson, *Malaya: The Land of Enchantment*, pp. 112-113.

<sup>332</sup> Thomson Road: *Straits Times*, 20 December 1899, p. 2, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016462; Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*, pp. 45 and 83; and: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 221 and 304. See also the photograph of Seah Song Seah's country house, in: Arnold Wright and H.A. Cartwright, editors, *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya* (1908), p. 636.

<sup>333</sup> Bukit Timah Road: Charlotte Cameron, *Wanderings in South-Eastern Seas* (1924), p. 46, mentions the homes of wealthy Chinese merchants seen along the way from Singapore Town to Woodlands, which most likely refers to Bukit Timah Road. The route to Woodlands along Bukit Timah Road was described by W. Robert Foran, in: *Malayan Symphony*, pp. 47-48. See also the mention of a residence in Bukit Timah Road which was owned by a wealthy Chinese businessman in: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 99.

<sup>334</sup> Dalvey Road: *Malaya Tribune*, 4 June 1924, p. 6, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0005841.

<sup>335</sup> Dunearn Road: Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*, pp. 61 and 182; and: *Straits Times*, 16 May 1885, p. 2, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016433.

<sup>336</sup> Tanjong Katong: Regarding the wealthy Chinese and their European neighbours who lived in Tanjong Katong in the 1930s, see W.R. Foran's first-hand account, in: W. Robert Foran, *Malayan Symphony*, p. 44, which is quoted in John Bastin's *Travellers' Singapore: An Anthology*, p. 223. See also the mentions of well-to-do Asians living in Katong, in: Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942, passim*; Lee Kip Lee, *Amber Sands: A Boyhood Memoir*, pp. 42-51; and: Daniel Chew, "Towards a Social History of Tanjong Pagar 1900-1940," in: *Tanjong Pagar: Singapore's Cradle of Development*, p. 26; Daniel Chew mentioned that Peranakan Chinese moved from Tanjong Pagar to Tanjong Katong in the 1920s. According to Brenda Yeoh, Tanjong Katong was a European area in the 1920s; see: Brenda Yeoh, *Contesting Space*, p. 225. One of the fine homes in Tanjong Katong was owned by Dato Sir Roland Braddell; see his book *The Lights of Singapore* (1934), p. 1. See also the mention of Europeans living along the East Coast, in: B.W. Hodder, "Racial Groupings in Singapore," *The Malayan Journal of Tropical Geography*, Volume One (October 1953), p. 29.

<sup>337</sup> Pasir Panjang: Margaret C. Wilson, *Malaya: The Land of Enchantment*, pp. 105 and 112.

Plain, would be an exclusive residential area for the *principal* or most important settlers, and his order specified that this class of *principal* people included *both* non-Europeans and Europeans alike.<sup>338</sup> Thus, from the early years of the Settlement, a tradition was established whereby the only qualification for living in the most fashionable suburbs was the qualification of wealth or socio-economic status, not race. If there was any residential segregation among the well-to-do inhabitants of colonial Singapore, it was segregation based upon money or the lack thereof, rather than racial or ethnic segregation.

Extensive tracts of at least some of the suburban residential areas were once part of the vast estates of wealthy nineteenth-century Chinese landowners: Tan Kim Seng owned a large amount of property in at least two suburban areas – one landholding in the neighbourhood of River Valley Road and Kim Seng Road,<sup>339</sup> and a 2,859-acre property in Pasir Panjang,<sup>340</sup> while Seah Eu Chin once owned a major landholding which extended at least eight miles from upper River Valley Road to Bukit Timah Road and Thomson Road.<sup>341</sup> Even in those prestigious suburban districts which were supposedly the most European of any residential areas within the Singapore Municipality, such as Tanglin, Claymore, and Lower Bukit Timah, the Europeans were still vastly outnumbered by their

---

<sup>338</sup> Sir Stamford Raffles, instructions to Captain C.E. Davis, George Bonham, and Alexander L. Johnston, 4 November 1822, paragraph 11, in: C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 83. See also: H.F. Pearson, "Short Notes: Lt. Jackson's Plan of Singapore," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume 26, Part I, July 1953, pp. 200-204, especially the map on p. 200, which is most likely a visual expression of Sir Stamford's instructions of 4 November 1822.

<sup>339</sup> Regarding Tan Kim Seng's property in the neighbourhood of River Valley Road and Kim Seng Road, see: Victor R. Savage and Brenda S.A. Yeoh, *Toponymics: A Study of Singapore Street Names* (Second Edition, 2004), p. 224.

<sup>340</sup> Regarding Tan Kim Seng's 2,859-acre property in Pasir Panjang, see: Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*, pp. 55 and 157.

<sup>341</sup> Regarding Seah Eu Chin's property, see: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 20; and: Victor R. Savage and Brenda S.A. Yeoh, *Toponymics: A Study of Singapore Street Names* (Second Edition, 2004), p. 122.

Asian fellow residents.<sup>342</sup> Syed Mohammed Alsagoff, a member of a prominent Arab family, entertained guests at his mansion in Dunearn Road, which featured a lake and teahouses on the grounds.<sup>343</sup> Teo Hoo Lye, who was one of the founders of the Sze Hai Tong Bank in 1907, owned a house at Dhoby Ghaut, which was demolished in 1937 to make way for the Cathay Building.<sup>344</sup> It is clear that wealthy Asians owned some of the most prominent mansions in Singapore – indeed, they probably owned most of them. Of course, this should be no surprise, since most of the rich people in colonial Singapore seem to have been wealthy Asians, despite the fact that this was supposedly a *European* colonial port.

To describe localities such as Tanglin as *European* could convey a misleading impression of racial homogeneity, exclusivity, and segregation, when, in fact, this was clearly not the case. In reality, it is unlikely that any civilian localities were truly exclusive to Europeans, in the sense that the population of Chinatown was overwhelmingly Chinese.<sup>345</sup> Although suburban mansions were often built in European architectural styles, this did not necessarily mean that their owners were Europeans: in fact, wealthy Chinese and other rich Asians often lived in Western-style mansions.<sup>346</sup>

---

<sup>342</sup> See Figures 2.8 and 2.9 in: Brenda Yeoh, *Contesting Space*, pp. 43 and 44. See also the mention of Tanglin in: George L. Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, p. 60. Regarding the so-called *European* and *aristocratic* nature of Tanglin and Claymore, see: Victor R. Savage and Brenda S.A. Yeoh, *Toponymics: A Study of Singapore Street Names* (First Edition, 2003), p. 10. Regarding the reputation of Tanglin as an exclusive suburb for Europeans, see: Norman Edwards, “The Colonial Suburb: Public Space as Private Space,” in: Chua Beng-Huat and Norman Edwards, editors, *Public Space: Design, Use and Management*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>343</sup> Iskandar Mydin, “The Singapore Malay / Muslim Community: Nucleus of Modernity,” in: Khoo Kay Kim, Elinah Abdullah, and Wan Meng Hao, editors, *Malays / Muslims in Singapore: Selected Readings in History, 1819-1965*, pp. 146-147.

<sup>344</sup> Lim Kay Tong, *Cathay: 55 Years of Cinema*, pp. 15 and 97; Tan Ee Leong, “The Chinese Banks Incorporated in Singapore & the Federation of Malaya,” *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 26, Pt. 1, 1953, p. 115.

<sup>345</sup> See the description of Chinatown in: B.W. Hodder, “Racial Groupings in Singapore,” *The Malayan Journal of Tropical Geography*, Volume One (October 1953), p. 30.

<sup>346</sup> See the descriptions and pictures of European-style mansions of wealthy Asians in colonial Singapore, in: Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*.

For example, Panglima Prang, a splendid Western-style home which was built around 1860 and housed Tan Kim Seng and several generations of his descendents over the years, was surrounded with an elegant verandah, which was ornamented with a grand classical colonnade that was reminiscent of an ancient Roman villa.<sup>347</sup> In the 1920s and early 1930s, Tan Kah Kee lived in a grand Western-style palace in Cairnhill Road, which later became the home of the wealthy banker Tan Sri Dr. Tan Chin Tuan.<sup>348</sup> Aw Boon Haw, the Tiger Balm King, lived in a Renaissance-style mansion known as Jade House, which was built in 1926, along Nassim Road in Tanglin.<sup>349</sup> Other examples of Western-style homes of prominent Asians in the colonial era included Karikal Mahal, the baroque mansion of Moona Kader Sultan along Still Road in Tanjong Katong, and Dr. Yin Suat Chuan's elegant Palladian mansion in Gilstead Road.<sup>350</sup> The mansions of Aw Boon Haw, Tan Kah Kee, and Dr. Yin Suat Chuan were all designed by the same architectural firm, called Chung & Wong.<sup>351</sup> Nothing prevented a wealthy Asian businessman, professional, or capitalist from living in a Western-style mansion in a fashionable suburb if he so desired, provided that he was sufficient wealthy.

---

<sup>347</sup> Regarding the history of Panglima Prang, where Tan Kim Seng's family lived from *circa* 1860 until 1982, see: Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*, pp. 42 and 154-157; see also the photographs of Panglima Prang on pp. 43, 97, and 154-157.

<sup>348</sup> Regarding Tan Kah Kee's Cairnhill Road mansion, see: C.F. Yong, *Tan Kah-kee: The Making of an Overseas Chinese Legend*, pp. 70 and 86; Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*, pp. 130, 131, and 134; Sharon Siddique, *Nutmeg, and a Touch of Spice: The Story of Cairnhill Road*, p. 19; Low Yit Leng, "Noble Houses: Surviving Colonial Estates of Yesteryear," in: *Singapore Chronicles: A Special Commemorative History of Singapore Published by Singapore Tatler on the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Republic*, p. 150.

<sup>349</sup> Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*, p. 179.

<sup>350</sup> For photos of the homes of Moona Kader Sultan and Dr. Yin Suat Chuan, see: Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*, on p. 118, and on pp. 214 and 215 respectively. Regarding Moona Kader Sultan, the Indian Cattle King of Singapore, see: René Onraet, *Singapore – A Police Background*, pp. 8-11; *Malaya Tribune*, 9 June 1937, p. 20, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0005945; and: Sharon Siddique and Nirmala Puru Shotam, *Singapore's Little India: Past, Present, and Future*, p. 58. Regarding Moona Kader Sultan's mansion in Katong, called the Karikal Mahal, see: Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*, pp. 55 and 118.

<sup>351</sup> Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*, p. 131.



### **The Cultivation of Gracious Hospitality**

The spaciousness of the homes of Asian and European elites indicates that they were designed for receiving guests: surviving floor plans show that such houses featured large entrance halls, dining rooms, and other rooms where guests could gather and socialise, all the while being suitably impressed, no doubt, by the graciousness of their surroundings.<sup>352</sup> The size and splendour of these homes qualified them as appropriate venues for elite social functions, where the hosts could invite guests of equal or even higher rank and prestige. There were numerous recorded examples of elites entertaining visitors at their homes, especially their fellow elites<sup>353</sup> – perhaps the most famous example of a popular Chinese host was the Honourable Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa, CMG, who welcomed many visitors – Europeans as well as Chinese – to his renowned gardens in Serangoon in the 1860s and 1870s.<sup>354</sup> The many guests who enjoyed Whampoa's hospitality over the years included not only local elites, but also Prince Alfred, the Duke of Edinburgh, in 1869, as well as other visiting European royalty, the King of Siam, President Ulysses Grant,<sup>355</sup> and Admiral Sir Henry Keppel.<sup>356</sup> Visits by internationally-known celebrities undoubtedly invested Whampoa's mansion with special symbolic significance in the local social context. Elites such as Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa and Aw

---

<sup>352</sup> For example, see the floor plans in: Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942*, pp. 154, 209, and 214; see also the photographs taken inside Panglima Prang, on pp. 97, 156, and 157.

<sup>353</sup> Regarding Chinese receiving European visitors in their homes, see: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 29-30, 54-55, 107-108, 181-182, 246-247, 270-271, 284-285, 289-290, 304, 314, and 441-442. See also: J.D. Vaughan, *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese of the Straits Settlements*, *passim*.

<sup>354</sup> C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, pp. 658-660; Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 53-55

<sup>355</sup> John Russell Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, Volume Two (1879), 198.

<sup>356</sup> *Straits Times*, 13 May 1876, p. 2, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016425; *Straits Times*, 3 April 1880, p. 1, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016427; and: Edwin Lee, *Historic Buildings of Singapore*, p. 2.

Boon Haw (who allowed the public to view the jade collection at his mansion)<sup>357</sup> obviously took great pride in knowing that their homes and gardens were admired (or envied) by visitors and passers-by alike, and it seems quite certain that the conspicuous display of signs of personal wealth, such as impressive mansions, gardens, vehicles, and social and recreational activities, was closely related to social status-striving – to a strong desire on the part of these elites to affirm and enhance their prestige within the colonial society.<sup>358</sup>

The hospitality which wealthy Chinese elites, such as the Honourable Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa, graciously offered their European guests by welcoming them into their homes and gardens, together with the efforts they made to embellish their homes with interesting furnishings, decorations, curiosities, and landscaping, suggests that these Chinese elites enjoyed the admiration of their mansions by their astonished *ang moh* visitors. Although Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa was the most famous Chinese host in colonial Singapore, he was not the only example of a wealthy Chinese who enjoyed displaying his collections of curiosities to those who visited his residence. In an account published in 1913, one European described his visit to the home of a wealthy Chinese contractor named Tan Keng Swee. Tan Keng Swee was a son of Tan Seng Poh, who was a prominent opium merchant and Municipal Commissioner in Singapore in the 1870s,<sup>359</sup>

---

<sup>357</sup> Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*, p. 179.

<sup>358</sup> On the psychological need for prestige in the value system of Chinese merchants in colonial Singapore, and the relationship between their display of wealth (including mansions and gardens) to their acquisition of prestige, see: Yen Ching-hwang, "Ch'ing's Sale of Honours and the Chinese Leadership in Singapore and Malaya (1877-1912)," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Volume 1, Number 2 (September 1970), pp. 26-32.

<sup>359</sup> According to Sir Ong Siang Song (p. 133), Tan Keng Swee and his brother, Tan Keng Wah, were the sons of Tan Seng Poh, who died on 18 December 1879. Regarding Tan Seng Poh, see also: Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*, 41-42, 45-46, 63, 76, 77, 79, and 107; Carl A. Trocki, *Prince of Pirates*, pp. 143-44; and: Carl A. Trocki, "Tan Seng Poh", in: John Butcher and Howard Dick (eds), *The Rise and Fall of Revenue Farming*, pp. 249-54.

and a renowned host in his own right.<sup>360</sup> Tan Keng Swee gave his Western visitor a personal tour of his Chinese-style mansion, with its fascinating displays of dwarf trees and aquaria containing schools of colourful fish. The European guest, George Morant, was also duly impressed with his host's dignity, intelligence, and courtesy.<sup>361</sup> Tan Keng Swee had successfully cultivated the social art of being a truly gracious host.

The graciousness of wealthy Chinese hosts and the degree to which they impressed their European visitors with their courtesy, shows that Chinese elites in colonial Singapore successfully cultivated the art of hospitality on a grand scale. The accounts of Europeans who enjoyed the hospitality of Chinese elites, such as Tan Keng Swee, Tan Seng Poh,<sup>362</sup> the Honourable Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa CMG, and the Honourable Seah Liang Seah,<sup>363</sup> as well as the local newspaper reports of multiracial social receptions held in Chinese mansions, indicate that the sumptuous private residences of Chinese elites must have been important venues for the development of social connections between Asian and European elites in colonial Singapore. By means of their mansions, wealthy Chinese elites projected an image of themselves as colonial elites who enjoyed at least the same economic and social status as their European fellow elites. The prestigious public images or personas of these Asian elites likely fostered their social interaction and integration with Western elites in the cosmopolitan community of prestige at the centre of the colonial society.

---

<sup>360</sup> See the account of a grand social reception at the home of Tan Seng Poh in 1876, attended by Asian and European elites, in the *Straits Times*, 26 August 1876, p. 1, R0016425.

<sup>361</sup> George C. Morant, *Odds and Ends of Foreign Travel* (1913), quoted in: John Bastin, *Travellers' Singapore: An Anthology*, pp. 178-181.

<sup>362</sup> *Straits Times*, 26 August 1876, p. 1, R0016425.

<sup>363</sup> Regarding Seah Liang Seah, see: Florence Caddy, *To Siam and Malaya in The Duke of Sutherland's Yacht 'Sans Peur'* (1889), p. 84.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

By hosting sumptuous social functions and receptions at their homes, Asian elites could proclaim their status to the rest of the elite society, thus ensuring that their membership in the elite class would be clearly recognised by their fellow elites of other races and ethnicities. After all, gracious hospitality, sumptuous mansions, and conspicuous consumption all convey unmistakable messages about personal wealth and status, which easily transcend the barriers of language and culture, since the display of wealth and social honour is an international language, clearly recognised and appreciated by Asians and Westerners alike. The fact that they could speak this language together clearly located them in the same elite social space, at the summit of the colonial society.

European visitors to colonial Singapore admired the mansions of wealthy Asians, and their descriptions of these splendid homes strongly suggest that the richest of the Asians may have been richer than any of the Europeans who resided here during the colonial era.<sup>364</sup> These mansions of wealthy Asians convincingly demonstrated – to all who wished to see – that Asian elites benefited greatly from the colonial system here,<sup>365</sup> that the wealthy Asians who dwelt in them were at least as triumphantly successful and privileged as any Europeans on this island, and that the colonial system which prevailed

---

<sup>364</sup> Regarding the mansions of the wealthy Chinese in Singapore, see: Arnold Wright and Thomas H. Reid, *The Malay Peninsula: A Record of British Progress in the Middle East* (1912), p. 227; Charlotte Cameron, *Wanderings in South-Eastern Seas* (1924), pp. 34 and 46; Margaret C. Wilson, *Malaya: The Land of Enchantment* (1937?), p. 105; and: John H. MacCallum Scott, *Eastern Journey* (1939), p. 18. See also the first-hand accounts of various European visitors to colonial Singapore, quoted in John Bastin's *Travellers' Singapore: An Anthology*, pp. 106, 125, 127, 128, 160, 167, 171, 178-180, and 193. See also: Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, p. 165, endnote 29; and: Lee Kip Lin, *The Singapore House, 1819-1942, passim*.

<sup>365</sup> Regarding Asians who succeeded economically under colonialism, see: Wang Gungwu, "A Short History of the Nanyang Chinese," in: Wang Gungwu, *Community and Nation: China, Southeast Asia and Australia* (1992 edition), pp. 22-25 and 32; D.A. Low, *Lion Rampant: Essays in the Study of British Imperialism*, p. 25; Wong Lin Ken, "Commercial Growth before the Second World War," in: Ernest C.T. Chew and Edwin Lee, editors, *A History of Singapore*, p. 62; Chiang Hai Ding, *A History of Straits Settlements Foreign Trade 1870-1915*, p. 53; Rajat Kanta Ray, "Asian Capital in the Age of European Domination: The Rise of the Bazaar, 1800-1914," *Modern Asian Studies*, Volume 29, Number 3 (July 1995), pp. 449-554; and: Rajeswary Ampalavanar Brown, *Capital and Entrepreneurship in South-East Asia*.

in Singapore and its Malayan hinterland was carried on as much by and for the Asian elites as for the European elites.<sup>366</sup> It might seem unnecessary to emphasise the point that Asian elites enriched themselves within the colonial system, were it not for the fact that there may be a tendency to underestimate the extent of the economic success of Asian elites during the colonial era.

With the passage of time, it may be easier to overlook the social and economic success of the Asian elites in the colonial era, and perhaps to imagine that only Europeans enjoyed wealth and prestige in those years. For example, *Past Times*, an interesting and informative book about Singapore social history written by a group of academics and published in 2003, includes a table which shows the population of Singapore from 1819 to 1867 as having consisted of two categories of people, namely Europeans and *coolies*.<sup>367</sup> Some readers of this book, *Past Times*, might conclude from this table that all Asians in Singapore between 1819 and 1867 were *coolies*, and thus that there were no wealthy Asians here at that time. That conclusion would naturally lead to an underestimation of the role of Asian elites in the colonial system, and an overestimation of the role of the European elites.

In fact, it is evident that there were many well-to-do Asians in Singapore between 1819 and 1867, and some of them were quite successful, such as Tan Che Sang, Choa Chong Long, Tan Tock Seng, Tan Kim Seng, Seah Eu Chin, Cheang Hong Lim, Tan Seng Poh, and Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa, to mention just a few of the most well-known names. Governor Robert Fullerton reported in 1829 that the richest inhabitants in the

---

<sup>366</sup> Compare this with the description of the mansions of wealthy Arabs and Chinese in the Dutch East Indies, in: J. Macmillan Brown, *The Dutch East: Sketches and Pictures* (1914), pp. 151-152.

<sup>367</sup> Alexius Pereira, "It's Us Against Them: Sports in Singapore," in: Chan Kwok Bun and Tong Chee Kiong, editors, *Past Times: A Social History of Singapore*, table on p. 147.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

Straits Settlements<sup>368</sup> were Chinese and Indians.<sup>369</sup> A Municipal Notification published in 1857 indicated that most of the three hundred principal property owners in the town of Singapore at that time were Asians.<sup>370</sup> This should not be surprising, since Singapore was actually an overwhelmingly Asian city: the 1871 census reported that there were only 1,946 Europeans in Singapore, compared with 54,572 Chinese, 26,141 Malays, 11,501 Indians, and 2,164 Eurasians.<sup>371</sup> According to John Cameron's description of Singapore written in 1864, with the exception of the European godowns located near the mouth of the Singapore River, all of the other godowns along the river belonged to Chinese.<sup>372</sup> This suggests some sense of the importance of Asian business elites in the economy and society of Singapore between 1819 and 1867; indeed, it seems quite likely that the number of well-to-do Asians vastly outnumbered their European fellow elites. Even in this early phase of the colonial era here, the role of Asian elites was so important on this island that they should not be underestimated, much less overlooked, in accounts

---

<sup>368</sup> The Straits Settlements included Singapore, Malacca, and Penang.

<sup>369</sup> Minute by Governor Robert Fullerton, dated 24<sup>th</sup> August 1829, published as extract number 154 in: C.D. Cowan, editor, "Early Penang & the Rise of Singapore 1805-1832: Documents from the manuscript records of the East India Company..." in the *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. XXIII, Pt. II, March 1950, p. 192; I am grateful to Clement Liew for kindly bringing this extract to my attention. See also: *Singapore Chronicle*, 1 July 1830, p. 3, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0009222.

<sup>370</sup> See the list of mostly names of individuals, as well as some names of firms, who were qualified to stand for election as Municipal Commissioners in Singapore, in a "Municipal Notification" published in the *Singapore Free Press*, 26 November 1857, p. 1, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0006022. About 225 of the roughly 300 names on this list, or 75 percent, were Asian. These ratepayers may be regarded as the principal property owners in the town of Singapore at that time, since these ratepayers were qualified for election based on the value of the rates assessed on the landed property which they owned, according to the annual rental value of their property – see: Act No. XXV of 1856, and XXVII of 1856, published in a "Government Notification" in the *Singapore Free Press*, 8 January 1857, p. 1, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0006022; see especially Sections III and IV of Act No. XXV, regarding assessment of rates, and Section VI of Act No. XXVII, regarding the qualification for election as Municipal Commissioners, which was the payment of at least forty rupees in annual rates.

<sup>371</sup> Sir Hayes Marriott, "Population of the Straits Settlements and Malay Peninsula during the last Century." *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, No. 62 (December 1912); the census figures are in tables on pages with no page numbers, following p. 31.

<sup>372</sup> John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India: Being a Descriptive Account of Singapore, Penang, Province Wellesley, and Malacca; Their Peoples, Products, Commerce, and Government*, p. 56. This book was written in 1864 and published in 1865.

of the social history of that era. The Asian population did not consist merely of manual labourers, with a few middle-class businessmen and professionals; it also included many of the richest people in this colonial Settlement.

The mixture of Asian-owned and European-owned mansions in prestigious suburbs presented a cosmopolitan public image of shared elite lifestyle and status among wealthy Asians and Europeans, a shared elite image which conspicuously asserted the social proximity of these Asian and European elites, placing them in the same rank and social stratum, and prominently displaying this image for public view. Clearly, colonialism worked very well indeed for several generations of successful Asian capitalists in Singapore; their success suggests that mutually-beneficial cooperation between Asian and European elites was a key factor in the development of the colonial system here. Asian elites evidently derived rich rewards from the colonial system, in both material and symbolic terms, and obviously had every reason to want this system to continue as long as possible for their own benefit. The distinction displayed by the nature and location of residences was not so much a *racial* division between wealthy Europeans in suburban mansions versus poverty-stricken Asians in congested slums, but rather, a *class* distinction between wealthy Asians *and* Europeans living in mansions, versus the masses who lived in shophouses and kampongs.<sup>373</sup> The residential distribution of the multiracial population was at least as much an expression of the class structure and economic inequality as it was of racial or ethnic identities. The imagery and status symbols of elite suburban life publicly identified Asian and European elites, and placed

---

<sup>373</sup> For another view, see: Norman Edwards, "The Colonial Suburb: Public Space as Private Space," in: Chua Beng-Huat and Norman Edwards, editors, *Public Space: Design, Use and Management*, pp. 24-39.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

them together as an elite class, while clearly distinguishing their class from the rest of the population.

The built environment of colonial Singapore, as the scenes and backdrop of the elite theatre of prestige, undoubtedly played an important role in the public representation of the local cosmopolitan elite class, in terms of how the public image of this class and its membership was presented, both to the elites themselves as well as to the general public. The high status and privileged lifestyles of the elites – and, thus, their identities as members of the elite class – were constantly on display for all to see, and the forms taken by such display were quite similar for all elites, regardless of their racial and cultural identities; their shared elites status was communicated by means of an international language or idiom of public representation and display, a representational idiom which effectively bridged the racial and cultural distinctions among these elites. Elite residential patterns presented a conspicuous image of an array of European-style mansions that were mostly inhabited by wealthy Asians. This was an image of successful Asian elite participation in the colonial system, resulting in their enjoyment of rich material and symbolic rewards; and it was an image in which Asian elites were presented as being at least the equals of their Western fellow elites.

Asian elites appropriated the a large share of the landscape, and visually dominated much of the colonial built environment, by building mansions and other conspicuous buildings. The mansions of the leading Asian elites in colonial Singapore – such as Tyersall Palace, Adis Lodge, and Eu Villa – were likely far more grand and imposing than the mansions of any of the European elites in this supposedly European colonial port city, with the exception of Government House, the palace of the Governors



who represented the imperial Crown. Thus, the leading Asian elites in colonial Singapore, such as the elites who owned these three mansions – Sultan Abu Bakar, Nissim Nissim Adis, and Eu Tong Sen, symbolically placed themselves on the same level of prestige as the Governors, and above all other Europeans in colonial Singapore. Life was good for Asian elites in colonial Singapore, and it would be understandable if they thought that the colonial system revolved around them and their interests.

### **Mansions as Venues for Multiracial Elite Social Gatherings**

The colonial-era mansions that have survived redevelopment – and the photographs of those mansions which failed to survive – are artifacts of colonial elite visual representation and the assertion of elite status and prestige through display.<sup>374</sup> The social function of the mansions was not merely an example of conspicuous consumption, through which elites employed their wealth to make an impression upon the general public, to create and enhance their images in public estimation. The mansions were, simultaneously, a means by which elites made impressions upon one another, identifying themselves to one another as fellow members of the elite class, as individuals who were eligible to be included in prestigious gatherings and institutions, and to take part in exchanges of symbolic capital with other elites. The masses and the membership of the elite class itself were thus the two audiences for the representations that were put on display by the homes of the elites.

The conspicuous interaction of Asian and European elites in public buildings and spaces, their participation together in public events and important meetings held in these

---

<sup>374</sup> The discussion of elite visual representation and display in Maurizio Peleggi's book *Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image* prompted me to think about these themes in Singapore's colonial history; see especially *Lords of Things* pp. 3, 13, 15, 20, and 44.

prestigious venues, the affixing of their names to streets and to commemorative tablets displayed on buildings, their use of prominent clubhouses and playing fields for socialising and recreation, and their dwelling in mansions located side-by-side in the same prestigious neighbourhoods, all proclaimed and affirmed their shared status as elites and fellow members of the same class, locating them together in the same region of social space, at the apex of the local hierarchy and the centre of the colonial society. Their mutual recognition of their shared elite status<sup>375</sup> – a recognition which was virtually impossible to ignore, given the degree of its conspicuousness and continual re-enactment in the various scenes of the theatre of prestige – provided the context for the cultivation of social connections and the social integration of their class as a multiracial elite community. By gathering together for social events, such as banquets, Asian and European elites fostered social connections amongst themselves, and cultivated a sense of shared status, identity, and membership in the elite class,<sup>376</sup> while bridging their cultural differences.

### **Renowned Chinese Hosts**

Asian elites in colonial Singapore invited European guests to social gatherings at their mansions from time to time throughout the colonial era.<sup>377</sup> In the 1830s, Choa Chong Long, a local property owner<sup>378</sup> who has been described as the first Chinese

---

<sup>375</sup> Regarding Asian and European elites mutually recognising one another's social status, see: David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*, pp. 100 and 126.

<sup>376</sup> See: Michael Dietler, "Theorizing the Feast," in: Michael Dietler and Brian Hayden, editors, *Feasts: Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics, and Power*, pp. 68, 72, 74, 76, 77, and 88.

<sup>377</sup> Regarding Chinese receiving European visitors in their homes, see: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 29-30, 54-55, 107-108, 181-182, 246-247, 270-271, 284-285, 289-290, 304, 314, and 441-442. See also: J.D. Vaughan, *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese of the Straits Settlements*, *passim*.

<sup>378</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 25-26.

opium merchant to acquire the Singapore opium monopoly,<sup>379</sup> was known for his hospitality in entertaining European guests at his spacious mansion.<sup>380</sup> In 1831, the *Singapore Chronicle* reported that Choa Chong Long hosted a dinner at his home on his birthday, and invited many influential guests. The article noted that the menu included both Chinese and Western food, and that toasts were proposed to various prominent Europeans, including King William IV, Earl Grey, the Duke of Wellington, and the late Sir Stamford Raffles, as well as to the Emperor of China. Other toasts celebrated the free trade policy and the importance of understanding between the Chinese and British merchants in Singapore.<sup>381</sup> Sadly, the popular Choa Chong Long was murdered in Macao in December 1838,<sup>382</sup> but other wealthy local Chinese businessmen continued his example of offering their gracious hospitality towards the European elites in Singapore throughout the colonial era.

Chinese elites gained well-deserved reputations for hospitality among their local European fellow elites, as well as European visitors to Singapore, including some who wrote accounts of their travels. Published accounts in books and newspapers of sociable interaction among Asian and European elites here fostered an image of social proximity and shared elite status or rank among these elites of different races, displaying their location in the same region of social space at the summit of the colonial society, and emphasising the cosmopolitan nature of the elite class here. The conspicuous consumption and lavish hospitality of wealthy Asians confirmed their status as equal or superior to their European fellow elites.

---

<sup>379</sup> Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, p. 232.

<sup>380</sup> George Windsor Earl, *The Eastern Seas* (1837), p. 364.

<sup>381</sup> *Singapore Chronicle*, 9 June 1831, p. 3, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0009223.

<sup>382</sup> C.B. Buckley, *An Anecdotal History*, p. 216; Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 30.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Tan Kim Seng, a wealthy local Chinese businessman and property owner, was renowned for his hospitality towards the Europeans here. He seems to have been highly respected by the Europeans, and he was honoured with the title of Justice of the Peace. Tan Kim Seng celebrated the opening of his new godowns in Battery Road in 1852 by inviting his Asian and European friends to a dance and a supper in the upstairs offices of his new building. This social function was apparently a great success, and was reported in detail in the *Singapore Free Press*. Resident Councillor Thomas Church proposed a toast to Tan Kim Seng during the supper, which included Asian refreshments. The guests danced until the early hours of the morning.<sup>383</sup> In May 1861, Tan Kim Seng hosted a ball for the local Europeans of Singapore in the Masonic Lodge,<sup>384</sup> which was then located in the mansion that was formerly the home of Thomas Church, facing the Padang. By the time Tan Kim Seng died in Malacca in 1864, another wealthy Chinese businessman, Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa, a Cantonese immigrant who later became the first Chinese Legislative Councillor here, had become renowned among the Europeans for his hospitality at his country estate in Serangoon, which was famous for its gardens.<sup>385</sup>

The tradition of Chinese elites offering hospitality to their Western fellow elites by inviting them into their homes was well established by the late nineteenth century, as generations of wealthy Chinese residents followed the examples set by Choa Chong Long, Tan Kim Seng, and Hoo Ah Kay. After Hoo Ah Kay Whampoa died in 1880,<sup>386</sup>

---

<sup>383</sup> *Singapore Free Press*, 13 February 1852, pp. 2-3, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0006018. See also: Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 47, and: C.B. Buckley, pp. 554-555.

<sup>384</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 49-50.

<sup>385</sup> John Turnbull Thomson, *Some Glimpses into Life in the Far East* (1864), reprinted under the title *Glimpses into Life in Malayan Lands*, pp. 307-311. See also: *Straits Times*, 13 May 1876, pp. 1-2, R0016425.

<sup>386</sup> *Straits Times*, 3 April 1880, p. 1, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016427.

his country estate was purchased by Seah Liang Seah, a wealthy Teochew and a Legislative Councillor, who renamed it *Bendemeer*.<sup>387</sup> In 1888, the Duke of Sutherland and his entourage visited Seah Liang Seah's home, where they were served tea and were impressed with their distinguished Chinese host's excellent command of the English language.<sup>388</sup> When Seah Liang Seah held a reception at his new home at Bendemeer in 1895, the guests included Governor Sir Charles Mitchell, who used a gold key to ceremonially open the front door.<sup>389</sup> Other examples of leading Chinese inviting Europeans to their homes for grand social functions included Tan Seng Poh in 1876,<sup>390</sup> Cheang Hong Lim in 1892, Choa Kim Keat in 1896 and 1905, and Low Kim Pong in 1906.<sup>391</sup> Accounts of these social events were published in the local press, and Sir Ong Siang Song later chronicled some of these events in his book, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, which was published in 1923; this book is largely concerned with the activities of local Chinese elites.

Socialising between Chinese and Europeans at the homes of prominent Chinese continued into the twentieth century. In 1937, Tan Chong Chew, a contractor for the Singapore Harbour Board, hosted a dinner at his home in River Valley Road for Sir George Trimmer and a large number of Asian and European guests.<sup>392</sup> In 1939, more than four hundred guests, including Archdeacon Graham White, attended a wedding reception at 61 Meyer Road in honour of the marriage of Rosalind Yuping Wong to Foo Yin Chiew; the bride was the daughter of the Honourable Dato S.Q. Wong, who was the

---

<sup>387</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 55.

<sup>388</sup> Florence Caddy, *To Siam and Malaya in The Duke of Sutherland's Yacht 'Sans Peur'* (1889), p. 84.

<sup>389</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 284-285.

<sup>390</sup> *Straits Times*, 26 August 1876, p. 1, R0016425.

<sup>391</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 270-271 (Cheang Hong Lim in 1892); pp. 289-290 (Choa Kim Keat in 1896 and 1905); and 107-108 (Low Kim Pong in 1906).

<sup>392</sup> *Malaya Tribune*, 30 June 1937, p. 9, R0005945.

chairman of a local newspaper, the *Malaya Tribune*.<sup>393</sup> These examples from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries suggest that social mingling between Asian and European elites during private social functions in their mansions was a feature of social life among the local cosmopolitan elite class throughout the colonial era.

The examples cited above, which are part of the documentary historical record, strongly suggest that there was at least a fair degree of social interaction and integration among Asian and European elites here in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and that, at the elite level at least, colonial Singapore certainly did not completely conform to a Furnivallian image of a socially-segregated plural colonial society, that is, a society strictly divided and *compartmentalised*<sup>394</sup> along racial or ethnic lines, whose members only socialised with those who shared their own racial or ethnic identities, and only interacted with members of other racial or ethnic sections in the *economic* realm. On the contrary, it would seem instead that *class* identity was at least as important as racial identity in the patterns of social interaction among Asian and European elites here. Indeed, the examples provided here may not convey the full extent of socialising among the members of the multiracial elite class.

The recorded and published accounts of such interracial elite social activity are likely only the tip of the iceberg; it is quite probable that a great deal of social mingling took place among Asian and European elites, and that probably only the grandest of such social functions found their way into newspaper articles and books. For example, it was reportedly customary then (as now) for Europeans to visit the homes of their Chinese

---

<sup>393</sup> *British Malaya* magazine, May 1939, p. 23.

<sup>394</sup> Regarding the problem of compartmentalisation and the importance of multiethnic interactions in colonial-era Malaya, see: Wu Xiao An, *Chinese Business in the Making of a Malay State, 1882-1941: Kedah and Penang*, pp. 4, 6, 10, 181-182, and 187.

friends each year during the Chinese New Year celebrations.<sup>395</sup> Europeans also attended social functions associated with the weddings of members of prominent local Chinese families.<sup>396</sup> It is probable that many of the more routine social functions did not find their way into the written historical records, as is the nature of social history. Social historical research must perforce rely upon the sample of information that happened to be recorded and is still available for study.<sup>397</sup>

### **The Theatre of Prestige and the Social Game**

When Asian and European elites socialised with one another at banquets and other social occasions in private mansions,<sup>398</sup> as well as at Government House, Victoria Memorial Hall, and elsewhere, they honoured one another by their presence<sup>399</sup> and association together as participants in prestigious social events and rituals. This pattern of interracial elite social interaction likely fostered social connections and a sense of cosmopolitan elite class identity and cohesion, as suggested by the fact that the same

---

<sup>395</sup> See the first-hand account of the customary reception of European visitors at the homes of wealthy Chinese during Chinese New Year in: J.D. Vaughan, *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese of the Straits Settlements* (originally published in 1879, republished in 1985), p. 45.

<sup>396</sup> See: Sir Orfeur Cavenagh's account of a visit to the home of Tan Kim Seng on the occasion of the marriage of Tan Kim Seng's son, in: General Sir Orfeur Cavenagh, *Reminiscences of an Indian Official*, p. 278; and: the description of the social function at the Singapore Town Hall in honour of the wedding of Tan Jiak Kim on 27 December 1878, which was reported in the *Singapore Daily Times* and quoted in: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 193-194. See also the mention of Sir James Swettenham's toast to Dr. Lim Boon Keng and his bride in 1896 in: H. Barlow, *Swettenham*, p. 529; and the report on the wedding reception in 1939 in honour of Rosalind Yuping Wong and Foo Yin Chiew, in: *British Malaya* magazine, May 1939, p. 23.

<sup>397</sup> See: E.H. Carr, *What Is History?*, pp. 1-13.

<sup>398</sup> For examples of social functions at the homes of Asian elites, including European guests, see the descriptions of social events at the homes of: Choa Chong Long (*Singapore Chronicle*, 9 June 1831, p. 3, R0009223), Tan Seng Poh (*Straits Times*, 26 August 1876, p. 1, R0016425), Seah Liang Seah (in 1895 – see: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 284-285), Choa Kim Keat (in 1895 – Song, pp. 289-290, and in 1905 – Song, p. 290), Tan Kheam Hock (in 1915 – Song, p. 258); Tuan Syed Ibrahim Omar Alsagoff (*Malaya Tribune*, May 25, 1937, p. 14, R0005944); and: Tan Chong Chew (*Malaya Tribune*, 30 June 1937, p. 9, R0005945). See the mention of these sorts of events and their significance, in: C.F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, p. 13.

<sup>399</sup> On receptions and honour, see: Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, p. 57.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

people routinely attended and participated in these gatherings, year after year. Together, the Asian and Western elites took part in a *social game*,<sup>400</sup> in which the prizes were symbols of status and prestige conferred through the recognition of fellow elites. This social game was a non-zero-sum game,<sup>401</sup> in which all participants won enhancement of their status, thanks to the *contagious*<sup>402</sup> nature of prestige and the prestige value inherent in making and displaying social connections with fellow elites. Association with high-status personalities was itself a type of status symbol,<sup>403</sup> especially when such association was publicised and recognised; since people can enhance their own prestige by associating with other prestigious individuals, high-status elites affirmed and augmented their social status by associating with one another. Moreover, their prestige gains were naturally magnified by publicity, such as when accounts of these elite social gatherings in colonial Singapore were published in the local Chinese-language and English-language newspapers, together with lists of the names of the people attended or who were invited to attend.<sup>404</sup>

The performances of elites in the colonial *theatre of prestige* – the public interactions among elites which were frequently publicised in local newspapers –

---

<sup>400</sup> Regarding the concept of a *social game*, see: E. Digby Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class*, pp. 11-12; Peter Burke, *The Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society in Italy*, p. 194; Norton E. Long, “The Local Community as an Ecology of Games.” *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (November 1958), p. 261; David Silverman, *The Theory of Organisations: A Sociological Framework*, pp. 210-212; and: Harvey Warren Zorbaugh, *The Gold Coast and the Slum: A Sociological Study of Chicago’s Near North Side*, pp. 49-64 and 279. See also the mention of the *game of honour* in: Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, p. 22.

<sup>401</sup> William J. Goode, *The Celebration of Heroes*, p. 125.

<sup>402</sup> On the *contagiousness* of prestige, see: Emile Benoit-Smullyan, “Status, Status Types, and Status Interrelations.” *American Sociological Review*, Volume 9, Number 2 (April 1944), p. 157. Compare with: Robert W. Fuller, *Somebodies and Nobodies*, p. 75.

<sup>403</sup> Erving Goffman, “Symbols of Class Status,” *The British Journal of Sociology*, Volume 2, Number 4 (December 1951), p. 299

<sup>404</sup> See, for example, the list of the names of guests who attended the ceremonial launching of an illuminated golden sea dragon by Tan Lark Sye in celebration of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, reported in: *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 2 June 1953, p. 5, NUS Central Library ZR 05677.



## *Scenes of Prestige*

benefited these elites socially and symbolically as individuals, as well as collectively as a class; their personal strategies for social success and symbolic enrichment functioned to integrate their class. Each time these elites honoured each other with symbolic capital, such by giving each other public praise, invitations to social functions<sup>405</sup> and memberships in prestigious organisations,<sup>406</sup> appointments to leadership positions and other distinctions, and by associating with one another in prestigious settings – and every time they cooperated to enhance the collective prestige of their class by establishing organisations and participating in celebrations – they were actually building and enhancing the social connections (or social capital) which linked them together; these were the connections which constituted their *individual* social capital *as well as* the social capital of their class, imparting cohesion, identity, and social reality to their class as a community of elites. The cooperative interactions of these Asian and European colonial elites involved mutually-beneficial *social exchanges* of symbolic capital, which socially and symbolically benefited these elites individually and collectively, as fellow members of the same elite class.<sup>407</sup> Every time they cooperated to build up status symbols, the

---

<sup>405</sup> See: Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, p. 57.

<sup>406</sup> On *memberships*, see: Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” in: John G. Richardson, ed., *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, pp. 248-249; and: G. William Domhoff, *The Higher Circles: The Governing Class in America*, p. 30. Regarding the shared elite comprehension of club memberships as symbols of elite status (even when the clubs were racially specific), see: John M. Carroll, *Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong*, p. 13, and: Chan Wai Kwan, *The Making of Hong Kong Society. Three Studies of Class Formation in Early Hong Kong*, pp. 193 and 205. See also the discussion of mutual recognition of elite status among Asian and European elites, in: David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*, p. 126.

<sup>407</sup> Regarding social exchange, see: Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, pp. 387 and 389; Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, p. 175; Marcel Mauss, *The Gift (Essai sur le don)*, p. 10 and 11; Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship (Les Structures Élémentaires de la Parenté)*, pp. 59-60 and 68; Peter M. Blau, *Exchange and Power in Social Life*, pp. 4, 89, 92, and 107; Alvin W. Gouldner, “The Norm of Reciprocity: A Preliminary Statement.” *American Sociological Review*, Volume 25, Number 2 (April 1960), pp. 161-178; William J. Goode, *The Celebration of Heroes: Prestige as a Social Control System*, pp. x, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 26, 31, 33, 40, 41, and 42-43; and: Pierre Bourdieu, “The Economy of Symbolic Goods,” in: *Practical Reason*, pp. 100 and 104.

symbolic system which they shared and from which they all benefited, they promoted social connections amongst themselves as a group.

Association among elite individuals likely fostered their social acquaintance, and the more influential people with whom each elite individual was acquainted, the more probable that each elite individual would have been able to obtain the cooperation of others in gaining material, social, and symbolic benefits<sup>408</sup> – which, in turn, would have contributed to their further efforts to increase and enhance their social connections and networks, so that those who were already rich in social and symbolic capital would tend to become further enriched with these resources, while continually cultivating the social integration of their class in the process. This process was thus an elite social mechanism of continuous social and symbolic enrichment of elite individuals and their class by means of the social exchange of symbolic capital, as they participated together in their colonial system of shared status symbols, recognising one another as fellow elites. As these Asian and European elites worked together to create and sustain their shared system of status symbols, thus recognising one another's status symbols, social rank, prestige, and fellow membership in the elite class, they thereby also created and sustained the social structure of their multiracial colonial elite class.<sup>409</sup>

---

<sup>408</sup> Regarding the usefulness of association with influential people in an individual's efforts to gain favours, see: Kwang-kuo Hwang, "Face and Favor: The Chinese Power Game," *The American Journal of Sociology*, Volume 92, Number 4 (January 1987), p. 958; see also the discussion of the relationship between people's social connections and networks and how others perceive their social status or image on p. 961, and the mention of overlapping social networks on p. 952. While Hwang's article is concerned with the Chinese social context, it seems likely that that these concepts apply to all societies.

<sup>409</sup> See: Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power," in: *Sociological Theory*, Volume 7, Number 1 (Spring 1989), p. 23; Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, p. 135; and: Pierre Bourdieu, "What Makes a Social Class? On The Theoretical and Practical Existence Of Groups," in: *Berkeley Journal of Sociology: A Critical Review*, Volume XXXII, 1987, p. 15.

### **Dignified Houses of Congregations and Associations**

A discussion of the private mansions of Asian and European elites would not be complete without a mention of another type of house that was very important to these elites – namely, their houses of worship, their elite schoolhouses, and the meeting-places of their clubs and chambers of commerce. While different ethnic groups tended to congregate in their own separate associations and professed a variety of religious faiths, the fact that many of these organisations and religions occupied distinctive buildings further emphasised that all of these elites belonged to the same social stratum at the summit of the colonial society. The houses of prestigious institutions, like the grand private homes of wealthy individuals and families, were important and highly-conspicuous symbols of elite status. The locations and architectural features of each of these buildings, as well as the extent to which they were consecrated and honoured by the passage of time and their association with heritage, all conferred additional prestige upon the organisations they housed and the individual members who belonged to them.

The variety of religious faiths in colonial Singapore is reflected in the names of the houses of worship described in Edwin Lee's book, *Historic Buildings of Singapore*, including: the Armenian Church of St. Gregory the Illuminator, St. Andrew's Cathedral, the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd, the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, the Church of St. Joseph, the Hajjah Fatimah Mosque, the Sultan Mosque, the Tan Si Chong Su, the Hong San See, the Jamae Mosque, the Sri Mariamman Temple, the Thian Hock Keng, the Heng Shan Ting, the Al-Abrar Mosque, the Telok Ayer Chinese Methodist Church, the Abdul Gaffoor Mosque, the Sri Perumal Temple, the Siong Lim Temple, and St.

George's Church.<sup>410</sup> Some houses of worship provided opportunities for the names of their benefactors or other important individuals to be displayed on inscribed tablets – for example, such tablets were displayed in the Po Chiak Keng Temple in Magazine Road,<sup>411</sup> in the Prinsep Street Church,<sup>412</sup> in St. Andrew's Cathedral,<sup>413</sup> and in the Thian Hock Keng Temple in Telok Ayer Street,<sup>414</sup> where Tan Tock Seng's name was inscribed at the top of the list of donors on the tablet.<sup>415</sup> The Hajjah Fatimah Mosque in Beach Road and the Abdul Gaffoor Mosque in Dunlop Street were named after their benefactors.<sup>416</sup> The construction of houses of worship thus provided one of the ways in which the names of Asian and European elites were inscribed upon the cityscape, recording their generosity in stone and commemorating their generosity and showing the general public that colonial Singapore belonged as much to Asian elites as to their Western fellow elites.

Perhaps the most outstanding example of an Asian leader whose name was commemorated and inscribed on the cityscape was that of Tan Tock Seng, a wealthy merchant and philanthropist who was appointed a Justice of the Peace by 1849.<sup>417</sup> His generosity led to the establishment of the Tan Tock Seng Hospital, which was founded in

---

<sup>410</sup> Edwin Lee, *Historic Buildings of Singapore*, pp. 26 (Armenian Church of St. Gregory the Illuminator), p. 27-28 (St. Andrew's Cathedral), p. 30 (Cathedral of the Good Shepherd and Church of St. Peter and St. Paul), p. 33 (Church of St. Joseph), p. 52 (Hajjah Fatimah Mosque), p. 53 (Sultan Mosque), p. 55 (Tan Si Chong Su), p. 56 (Hong San See), p. 64 (Jamae Mosque), pp. 65-66 (Sri Mariamman Temple), p. 71 (Thian Hock Keng and Heng Shan Ting), p. 72 (Al-Abrar Mosque), p. 73 (Telok Ayer Chinese Methodist Church), p. 75 (Abdul Gaffoor Mosque), p. 76 (Sri Perumal Temple), pp. 77-79 (Siong Lim Temple), and p. 87 (St. George's Church).

<sup>411</sup> C.F. Yong, *Tan Kah-kee: The Making of an Overseas Chinese Legend*, p. 22.

<sup>412</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 79 and 98.

<sup>413</sup> C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 297.

<sup>414</sup> Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*, p. 438, and Edwin Lee, *Historic Buildings of Singapore*, p. 71.

<sup>415</sup> Kamala Devi Dhoraisingam and Dhoraisingam S. Samuel, *Tan Tock Seng: Pioneer: His Life, Times, Contributions and Legacy*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>416</sup> Edwin Lee, *Historic Buildings of Singapore*, pp. 52 and 75.

<sup>417</sup> Tan Tock Seng was listed as a Justice of the Peace in the 1849 edition of *The Singapore Almanack, and Directory*, p. 18. This directory is on NUS microfilm reel R0011768.

1844 and opened in 1849.<sup>418</sup> The inscription of the names of generous individuals on the cityscape asserted that these Asians and Europeans were in the same league together, as leading public benefactors and philanthropists.

### **Prestigious Organisations and their Distinctive Houses**

Asians and Europeans alike established prestigious associations, which were dignified through their identification with impressive buildings. One of the most historic and architecturally distinctive meeting-places of any association in colonial Singapore was the ornate headquarters of the Hokkien Huay Kuan in Telok Ayer Street: the Thian Hock Keng, a temple which was built between 1839 and 1842 on the site of an earlier temple.<sup>419</sup> The leaders of the Hokkien Huay Kuan (which was known as the Thean Hock Keong from 1839 to 1916) included Tan Tock Seng, Tan Kim Seng, Tan Kim Ching, Tan Boo Liat, and Tan Kah Kee.<sup>420</sup> Around 1845, a group of Teochew merchants founded a society called the Ngee Ann Kongsi, and established a Teochew temple in Phillip Street.<sup>421</sup>

By the 1870s, the Ghi Hin Society had an impressive headquarters in the Rochore district of Singapore, which featured large dining rooms and kitchens which could

---

<sup>418</sup> Kamala Devi Dhoraingam and Dhoraingam S. Samuel, *Tan Tock Seng: Pioneer: His Life, Times, Contributions and Legacy*, especially pp. 34-35 and 55-56. See also: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 61-66; and: "Tan Tock Seng's Hospital Ordinance," in: *The Laws of the Straits Settlements Edition of 1936*, Volume V, Chapter 192, pp. 145-149.

<sup>419</sup> Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*, p. 438; Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore* (1923), p. 93. Regarding the history of the Hokkien Huay Kuan, see: Edwin Lee, "Community, Family, and Household," in: Ernest C. T. Chew and Edwin Lee, editors, *A History of Singapore*, p. 248; and: C.F. Yong, *Tan Kah-kee: The Making of an Overseas Chinese Legend*, especially pp. 134-142.

<sup>420</sup> C.F. Yong, *Tan Kah-kee: The Making of an Overseas Chinese Legend*, pp. 134 and 138-139.

<sup>421</sup> "Ngee Ann Kongsi (Incorporation) Ordinance." In: *The Laws of the Straits Settlements Edition of 1936. In Five Volumes*. Singapore: Government Printing Office, Singapore, 1936, Volume V, Chapter 258, pp. 724-747.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

prepare feasts for hundreds of men.<sup>422</sup> The Straits Chinese Recreation Club was established at Hong Lim Green in 1885,<sup>423</sup> while the fact that there was a street in Chinatown known as Club Street suggests the importance of clubs to Chinese elites. Club Street was the home of the Goh Loo Club,<sup>424</sup> the Weekly Entertainment Club (established in 1891),<sup>425</sup> and the Ee Hoe Hean Club (which was located in Club Street from 1910 to 1925, before moving to Bukit Pasoh Road).<sup>426</sup> In 1947, the Teochew section of the Chinese community built an imposing modern building with Chinese-style terra-cotta roofs in Tank Road; this building became the home of the Ngee Ann Kongsi, the Teo Chew Association, and the Teo Chew (Poit Ip) Huay Kuan.<sup>427</sup>

The Chinese also established prestigious clubs outside of Chinatown. The Chinese Swimming Club was founded in 1905 in the seaside suburb of Katong,<sup>428</sup> where many wealthy Chinese established their homes in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>429</sup> The Garden Club, a social club with elite Chinese members, was established in 1916 with Dr. Lim Boon Keng as its first President, and moved into the top floor of the Raffles Chambers building in Raffles Place by 1919. In the 1930s, its members included Tan Chin Tuan,

---

<sup>422</sup> J.D. Vaughan, *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese of the Straits Settlements* (1879; reprinted in 1985), pp. 115-116. See also: Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*, p. 132.

<sup>423</sup> See the report on the founding of the Straits Chinese Recreation Club at Hong Lim Green, in the *Straits Times*, 14 January 1885, p. 2, R0016433.

<sup>424</sup> Regarding the Goh Loo Club, see: Melanie Chew, *Leaders of Singapore*, pp. 20 and 37; Chan Kwok Bun and Claire Chiang See Ngoh, *Stepping Out: The Making of Chinese Entrepreneurs*, p. 339; and: Yap Pheng Geck, *Scholar, Banker, Gentleman Soldier: The Reminiscences of Dr. Yap Pheng Geck*, p. 67.

<sup>425</sup> Regarding the Weekly Entertainment Club, see: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 293; and: Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*, p. 452.

<sup>426</sup> Regarding the Ee Ho Hean Club, see: C.F. Yong, *Tan Kah-kee: The Making of an Overseas Chinese Legend*, p. 160, and: Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings*, p. 472.

<sup>427</sup> Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*, p. 236.

<sup>428</sup> On the founding of the Chinese Swimming Club (originally called the Tanjong Katong Swimming Party) in 1905, see: Sir Ong Siang Song, p. 380; see also the Foreword by Dr. Wee Kim Wee, in: Richard Yap, Editor-in-Chief, *Singapore Chinese Swimming Club: 88 Years and Beyond*, p. 10.

<sup>429</sup> Daniel Chew, "Towards a Social History of Tanjong Pagar 1900-1940," in: *Tanjong Pagar: Singapore's Cradle of Development*, p. 26.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

C.C. Tan, the Hon. Tay Lian Teck, and Yap Pheng Geck. The Garden Club relocated to the China Building<sup>430</sup> in Chulia Street by early 1932, shortly before Lee Kong Chian became the President of this club.<sup>431</sup> According to Lee Kip Lee, the Garden Club also occupied a seaside mansion with a tennis court in Siglap.<sup>432</sup> In addition to clubhouses, luxury hotels could also serve as venues for gatherings of Asian and European elites. The Old Boys of the prestigious Raffles Institution gathered at the world-famous Raffles Hotel for a dinner on 5 June 1911.<sup>433</sup>

The Raffles Hotel was also the venue for the founding of the multiracial Singapore Rotary Club on 6 June 1930. Ho Hong Bank Manager Lim Bock Kee arranged this meeting, at which Roland St. John Braddell (later *Dato Sir* Roland) became the club's first president. The membership of the Rotary Club included Asian and European business and professional elites, as well as government officials and officers in the armed forces. The charter members of the Rotary Club included H.R. Arbenz (the Swiss Consul), S.J. Chan, Cheong Koon Seng, Ching Kee Sun, Mohammed Eunus bin Abdullah (the Editor of *Lembaga Melayu*), R.J. Farrer (the President of the Singapore Municipality), A.M. Goodman (the Secretary of Chinese Affairs), F.R. Heron (the

---

<sup>430</sup> There is a photograph of the China Building in the National Archives of Singapore, Accession No. 147985, and another in: Mike Macbeth, *Quiet Achiever: The Life and Times of Tan Sri Dr. Tan Chin Tuan*, p. 98. The China Building was built in 1932 and demolished in 1971, to be replaced by the OCBC Centre, which was opened in 1976. See: Macbeth, *Quiet Achiever*, pp. 190, 192, and 195.

<sup>431</sup> On the opening of the Garden Club in 1916, see: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 534-535. The Garden Club was meeting in the Raffles Chambers as early as 1919 – *Singapore Free Press*, 7 January 1919, p. 10, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0006130. It was still in Raffles Chambers in 1931. By January 1932, the Garden Club had moved from Raffles Chambers to the China Building, in Chulia Street. The leadership of the Garden Club in the 1930s included prominent Chinese men, such as Lee Kong Chian, Lim Bock Kee, the Hon. Dr. Lim Han Hoe, Tan Chin Tuan, C.C. Tan, the Hon. Tay Lian Teck, and Yap Pheng Geck. See the Minute Book of the Garden Club in the National Archives of Singapore, microfilm reel NA 110. The Garden Club ceased operations in the early 1970s; see: Lee Su Yin, "British Chinese Policy in Singapore, 1930s to Mid-1950s: With Particular Focus on the Public Service Career of Tan Chin Tuan." MA Thesis, Department of History, National University of Singapore, 1995, p. 22.

<sup>432</sup> Lee Kip Lee, *Amber Sands: A Boyhood Memoir* (1995 edition), p. 10.

<sup>433</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 466-467.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

Managing Director of Singapore Cold Storage), N. Hirowoka, Dr. A.L. Hoops (the Principal Civil Medical Officer), Dr. Lim Han Hoe (later Sir Han Hoe Lim), Lee Kong Chian (the owner of the Lee Rubber Company), M.V. Pillai, Major-General H.L. Pritchard (the General Officer Commanding Malaya), Sir John Scott (the Colonial Secretary), Shaik Yahya bin Ahmad Afifi (the General Manager of Alkaff & Company), J.M. Sime (the Director of Sime Darby & Company), Tan Guan Chua, Captain E.C.O. Thomson (Royal Navy), W.J. Wilcoxson (the Managing Director of the Straits Trading Company), W.A. Wilson (the Editor of the *Malaya Tribune*), Dr. (later Sir) Richard Winstedt (the Director of Education), S.Y. Wong, S.Q. Wong, Charles E. Wurtzburg (Director of Mansfield & Company), and A.J. Zylstra (the Manager of the New Singapore Ice Works). Although the Rotary Club did not have a clubhouse, it soon established its customary luncheon venue at the Adelphi Hotel.<sup>434</sup> By 1939, the members of the Rotary Club were meeting at the Adelphi Hotel every Wednesday afternoon.<sup>435</sup>

### **Chambers of Commerce – European, Chinese, and Indian**

The local chambers of commerce provided additional venues for elite gatherings. The Singapore Chamber of Commerce, founded in 1837, was originally a multiracial organisation,<sup>436</sup> but it seems to have evolved into a European organisation by around

---

<sup>434</sup> Regarding the Singapore Rotary Club, see: Rajabali Jumabhoy, quoted in: *Leaders of Singapore* by Melanie Chew, p. 63; Rajabali Jumabhoy, *Multiracial Singapore – On to the Nineties*, pp. 64-65; Leo Cresson, *Rotary Club of Singapore 1930-1980*; and: John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, pp. 191-192.

<sup>435</sup> *The Singapore and Malayan Directory for 1939*, p. 1012.

<sup>436</sup> See the regulations and list of committee members, quoted from the minutes of a meeting of the Singapore Chamber of Commerce on 20 February 1837, in: T.J. Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account of the British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca*, Volume I, pp. 391-395. See the list of members of the Singapore Chamber of Commerce in the 1849 edition of *The Singapore Almanack, and Directory*, p. 26 (R0011768): the list includes Arab, Chinese, German, Jewish, Parsi, and Scottish names. See also: Sir Ong Siang Song, pp. 40-41 and 46.



1860.<sup>437</sup> By this time, the Chinese business elites had established a number of prestigious organisations of their own, such as the Hokkien Huay Kuan and the Teochew Ngee Ann Kongsi,<sup>438</sup> which were likely as important to the Hokkien and Teochew populations in the nineteenth century as the Chamber of Commerce was to the tiny European population.

Asian and European elites established their associations in dignified buildings, some of which were even palatial. These buildings were highly conspicuous status symbols, which enhanced the prestige of the organisations, and of the elites who belonged to them. Even though the Asian and European elites often seemed to prefer having separate associations that were specific to their own ethnic groups, the fact that they each had their own prestigious organisations in equally prestigious buildings helped to place all of these elites on the same level of social status and distinction, locating them together in the centre of the colonial society.

Two of the most prestigious European organisations occupied the same site for much of the colonial era. From 1879 to the 1920s, the Singapore Chamber of Commerce – as well as another prestigious European organisation, the Singapore Club – were both located along Collyer Quay, the bund of colonial Singapore, in the Exchange Building.<sup>439</sup> This waterfront site was not far from Raffles Place. This dignified building was demolished in the 1920s and replaced by the imposing Fullerton Building, which was opened on the same site in 1928 and became the new home of both the Chamber and the

---

<sup>437</sup> Chiang Hai Ding, *A History of Straits Settlements Foreign Trade 1870-1915*, p. 222; Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 114.

<sup>438</sup> "Ngee Ann Kongsi (Incorporation) Ordinance." In: *The Laws of the Straits Settlements Edition of 1936. In Five Volumes*. Singapore: Government Printing Office, Singapore, 1936, Volume V, Chapter 258, pp. 724-747.

<sup>439</sup> Walter Makepeace, "Institutions and Clubs," in: Makepeace et al., Volume Two, p. 312.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

Singapore Club, as well as the General Post Office.<sup>440</sup> The Singapore Club remained in the Fullerton Building until the end of the colonial era.<sup>441</sup> Other European social institutions with prestigious meeting-places included the Ladies' Lawn Tennis Club, the Masonic Lodge, the Royal Singapore Golf Club, the Royal Singapore Yacht Club, the Singapore Cricket Club, the Singapore Polo Club, the Singapore Swimming Club, the Swiss Club, the Tanglin Club, and the Teutonia Club. The historic Victorian-era Cricket Club and Masonic Lodge have survived into the twenty-first century, together with the splendid clubhouse of the Teutonia Club, a German social club, which became the Goodwood Park Hotel.

Asian businessmen formed their own chambers of commerce, which paralleled the (European) Singapore Chamber of Commerce. Chinese business elites established the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce in 1906, and found a distinctive and historic home for this organisation in a traditional Chinese-style mansion in Hill Street, the former home of the late Wee Ah Hood, whose son, Wee Kim Yam, was one of the early leaders of the Chinese Chamber.<sup>442</sup> In 1923, Song Ong Siang (later Sir Ong Siang Song) wrote that this mansion was one of only four famous Chinese-style mansions that were still remaining in Singapore.<sup>443</sup> Wee Ah Hood's distinctive home continued to serve as the headquarters of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce until after the end of the colonial era, when it was demolished and replaced by a high-rise building, that was completed in 1964 and continued to house the Chamber into the twenty-first century.<sup>444</sup>

---

<sup>440</sup> Melanie Chew, *Memories of the Fullerton*, pp. 103, 131, and 146.

<sup>441</sup> Ilsa Sharp, *The Singapore Cricket Club 1852-1985*, p. 140.

<sup>442</sup> Arnold Wright and H.A. Cartwright, editors, *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya* (1908), p. 714.

<sup>443</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 103 and 335-336.

<sup>444</sup> Lawrence G. Mani, editor, *Fifty Eight Years of Enterprise: Souvenir volume of the new building of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce – 1964*.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

Aside from the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce, the wealthy Chinese business elites of colonial Singapore also gathered in their exclusive clubs, such as the Ee Ho Hean Club, the Garden Club, the Goh Loo Club, the Straits Chinese Recreation Club, and the Weekly Entertainment Club.

Indian businessmen in Singapore established their own Chamber of Commerce. The Indian Merchants Association, founded in 1924, became the Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce in 1935. After operating in a building in Malacca Street for a few years, this organisation moved into a building at Raffles Quay, where it remained until that building was demolished to make way for the Asia Insurance Building. The Indian Chamber spent the rest of the colonial era in a building in Robinson Road.<sup>445</sup> The Chettiar community of Singapore established the Chettiar Chamber of Commerce in 1931.<sup>446</sup> Indians in Singapore also established the Singapore Indian Association in 1923,<sup>447</sup> and the Singapore Sikhs Cricket Club in 1927 (which became the Singapore Khalsa Association in 1931).<sup>448</sup>

Besides the Chinese, the Indians, and the Europeans, a number of other ethnic groups in the Settlement also established their own organisations. One of the most prominent of these was the Singapore Recreation Club, a prestigious club founded by members of Eurasian community in 1883 at the Padang, opposite the (European)

---

<sup>445</sup> *Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce. Founded December 1924. Sixtieth Anniversary Memento*, pp. 1 and 6.

<sup>446</sup> Hans-Dieter Evers and Jayarani Pavadarayan, "Religious Fervour and Economic Success: The Chettiars of Singapore," in: K.S. Sandhu and A. Mani, editors, *Indian Communities in Southeast Asia*, p. 856.

<sup>447</sup> R.B. Krishnan, *Indians in Malaya: A Pageant of Greater India*, p. 27; Leslie Netto, *Passage of Indians*, pp. 31-32; and: Rajabali Jumabhoy, *Multiracial Singapore – On to the Nineties*, pp. 55-56 and 89.

<sup>448</sup> Tan Tai Yong, *Singapore Khalsa Association*, pp. 23 and 25.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

Singapore Cricket Club;<sup>449</sup> the Singapore Recreation Club was still located in the same distinctive location in the early twenty-first century. Clubs and clubhouses for various ethnicities appeared in the early decades of the twentieth century, including the Japanese Association at Wilkie Road in 1915,<sup>450</sup> the (Jewish) Myrtle Club at Mount Elizabeth by 1916,<sup>451</sup> the American Association in 1917,<sup>452</sup> and the (Ceylonese) Lanka Union in 1920, which became the Ceylon Sports Club in 1928 and built a clubhouse at Balestier Road in 1930.<sup>453</sup> Rajabali Jumabhoy, the President of the Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce in 1935, joined various clubs in the 1920s, including the Persektuan Setia Club in North Bridge Road (a club for Malays and other Muslims), the Muslim Association at Selegie and Wilkie Roads, and the Arab Club.<sup>454</sup> The multiracial Singapore Island Club opened in 1932, offering a clubhouse and golf course for the enjoyment of its ethnically-diverse membership, including Chinese, Eurasians, Europeans, Indians, Japanese, and Malays.<sup>455</sup>

This is only a small sample of the many meeting-halls built by various associations of Asian and European elites over the years, where they gathered for social and other purposes. According to Maurice Freedman, there were about 1,500 associations in Singapore *circa* 1950, and most of them were Chinese.<sup>456</sup> Still, this

---

<sup>449</sup> Makepeace et al., *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume Two, pp. 365-367; Patrick Khaw, "The Singapore Recreation Club: 1883-1963," B.A. Honours Thesis, Department of History, National University of Singapore, 1986/87.

<sup>450</sup> Prewar Japanese Community in Singapore – *Picture and Record* (1998), pp. 80-81 and 228.

<sup>451</sup> *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, Vol. LI, No. 71, 30 June 1916, p. 1062, Notification No. 794, and: Eze Nathan, *The History of Jews in Singapore 1830-1945*, p. 69.

<sup>452</sup> Glenn A. Wood, editor, *American Association of Singapore 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*, p. 9.

<sup>453</sup> <http://www.cscsingapore.org.sg/aboutus/index.htm> – "History of the Ceylon Sports Club 1928-1999." See the photo of the Ceylon Sports Club in: Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places*, p. 122.

<sup>454</sup> Rajabali Jumabhoy, *Multiracial Singapore – On to the Nineties*, pp. 59 and 65.

<sup>455</sup> *British Malaya* magazine, October 1932, p. 132, and: *Malaya Tribune*, 29 August 1932, p. 10, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0005899.

<sup>456</sup> Maurice Freedman, *Chinese Family and Marriage in Singapore*, p. 93.

sample – which includes some of the most prestigious organisations of the colonial era – should be sufficient to indicate that Asian and European elites alike enjoyed the distinction of belonging to prestigious organisations, which were housed in buildings that were dignified, and sometimes palatial. It seems likely that both Asian and European elites viewed club membership as an important status symbol which helped to define them as members of the elite class. The value attached to club membership may thus be seen as a value that was held in common by Asian and Western elites alike, and an example of how these elites participated in the same system of status symbols.

### **Elite Schoolhouses and Elite Founders of Schools**

The elite schoolhouses of colonial Singapore served as important status symbols, as well as functioning as prestigious venues where generations of Asian elites of different ethnicities gained their educational qualifications and became acquainted with their fellow elites, and where they acquired connections with an old school tradition which put them in the same league as their Western fellow elites. Some of the most prominent educational institutions during the colonial era included Raffles Institution, St. Joseph's Institution, the Anglo-Chinese School's Oldham Hall, the Singapore Chinese High School, and Raffles College. Each of these institutions was housed in its own architecturally distinctive premises – Raffles Institution and St. Joseph's Institution were located in dignified buildings not far from the Padang, while the Chinese High School and Raffles College each had impressive buildings and spacious grounds along Bukit Timah Road, a prestigious suburb in the vicinity of the Botanic Gardens. Oldham Hall was first located in a large house called Bellevue in Oldham Lane off Orchard Road (near

Government House), that was acquired in 1888;<sup>457</sup> in 1926, Oldham Hall moved to a neoclassical mansion called Dunearn House in Barker Road.<sup>458</sup> The historic Raffles Institution building, a neoclassical structure, was demolished after the colonial era, and replaced by Raffles City, but the historic St. Joseph's Institution building has been preserved and became the Singapore Art Museum, while the stately neoclassical Singapore Chinese High School building continued to be used for its original purpose into the twenty-first century.

Each of these prestigious educational institutions could bring together people from different backgrounds – the Chinese High School could bring together Chinese students of different dialect groups into a Mandarin-medium learning environment, while Raffles Institution, St. Joseph's Institution, Oldham Hall, and Raffles College could attract students of various races. For example, the list of prize-winning students at the elite Raffles Institution in 1885, which was published in the *Straits Times*, included a variety of Asian and Western names: Ah Pang, Alvisse, Angus, Baptist, Basagoiti, Beins, Bennett, Bheem, Bristowe, Bun Guan, Choon Kim, Coghlan, Comarasamy, Eng Wa, Finck, Ghin Cho, Ghin Kiat, Hang Seng, Holloway, Hong Jauh, Hong Pin, Jun Tek, Kee Ho, Keng Tuck, Keun, Kim Leong, Kwang Seng, (Lim) Boon Keng, McKenzie, Mahmud, Mahomet Taib, Meherjee, Mowe, Neubronner, Norris, Oehlers, Ogle, Oliveiro, Olmeyer, Ong Gan, Perreau, Pong Guan, Quee Lan, Rappa, Rawlins, Remedios,

---

<sup>457</sup> C. Bazell, "Education in Singapore," in: Makepeace *et al.*, eds., *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume One, p. 458.

<sup>458</sup> Regarding the two Oldham Halls at two different locations, first at Oldham Lane, off Orchard Road, where Plaza Singapura is today, later at Barker Road, see: Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 272; Yap Pheng Geck, *Scholar, Banker, Gentleman Soldier*, p. 17; George L. Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, pp. 187-188; Dennis Ang, Chia Ming Chien, Ng Khee Jin, Clarence Tan, Tan Chi Chiu, and Maureen Thevathasan, *Hearts, Hopes & Aims: The Spirit of the Anglo-Chinese School*, pp. 66-67 and 123; and: Victor R. Savage and Brenda S.A. Yeoh, *Toponymics: A Study of Singapore Street Names* (Second Edition, 2004), p. 112.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

Schlatter, Schuck, Scott, Sheriff, (Song) Ong Siang, Soon Chiang, Soon Khee, Soon Tee, Stubbs, Towers, Wah Chee, Warne Sopaien, Wat Seng, Westerhout, Wilson, Yan Hee, Yan Tek, Yang Bun, and Yzelman.<sup>459</sup> The boarders at Oldham Hall were a similarly diverse group, including Chinese, Eurasian, European, Japanese, and Jewish students, and the son of the Sultan of Perak.<sup>460</sup> This list provides some sense of the multiethnic nature of Raffles Institution in the nineteenth century.

Another social function of the elite schoolhouses, and one which was completely separate from their educational function as schools, was their role as the means of providing conspicuous publicity to generous benefactors for their donations to these institutions, by commemorating their names in inscriptions on stone tablets. Several such commemorative tablets from the early years of the twentieth century may still be seen today at the former home of St. Joseph's Institution (now the Singapore Art Museum), while another tablet is still visible in the Oei Tiong Ham Hall (which now houses the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy) on the campus of the former Raffles College, off Bukit Timah Road near the Botanic Gardens.<sup>461</sup> The listing of the names of Asian and European elites on these tablets reflected – and, perhaps, also helped to create and sustain – their proximity in social space, and contributed to the public perception (and, hence, the social reality)<sup>462</sup> of the cohesion of the multiracial colonial elite class. In the case of Raffles College, certain especially generous benefactors were given a degree of monumental publicity which was far more conspicuous than a marble tablet: when the

---

<sup>459</sup> *Straits Times*, 13 February 1885, p. 3, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0016433.

<sup>460</sup> Dennis Ang, Chia Ming Chien, Ng Khee Jin, Clarence Tan, Tan Chi Chiu, and Maureen Thevathasan, *Hearts, Hopes & Aims: The Spirit of the Anglo-Chinese School*, p. 66.

<sup>461</sup> Regarding the commemorative tablet in Oei Tiong Ham Hall at Raffles College, see: *Malaya Tribune*, April 22, 1929, p. 3, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0005872.

<sup>462</sup> Regarding *social reality*, see: Charles Horton Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order*, Revised Edition 1922, pp. 95 and 119-124.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

Raffles College campus began operations in 1928, it included buildings named after some of its leading wealthy benefactors, namely, Oei Tiong Ham, Sir Manasseh Meyer, and Eu Tong Sen.<sup>463</sup> The naming of these buildings after Asian elites associated their names with the prestigious name of Raffles in a symbolically powerful and monumental affirmation of the colonial system's multiracial character, as well as the cosmopolitan membership of the colonial elite class. Schools were not only places of learning; they were also monuments to individual prestige and status, and to the multiracial nature of the colonial elite class.

Schools could provide especially rich prestige rewards or symbolic capital to the key founders and benefactors of educational institutions. This tradition began in 1823, when Sir Stamford Raffles founded the Singapore Institution with donations from the leading local Malays and Europeans.<sup>464</sup> Although the project soon ran into difficulties, it was revived in 1836, and the dignified buildings along Singapore's beachfront were finally ready for classes to begin in December 1837, with a multiracial student body that included 102 Chinese boys, forty-six Indians, and fifty-one Malays.<sup>465</sup> After the name of the Singapore Institution was changed to Raffles Institution in 1868,<sup>466</sup> the school became a prestigious educational monument to the memory of Raffles, which helped to enhance and sustain the prestige of his name and legend.

Local Asian community leaders continued the tradition of establishing schools, a tradition that was initiated in Singapore by Raffles. For example, Byramjee Hormusjee

---

<sup>463</sup> *Malaya Tribune*, 22 April 1929, p. 3, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0005872.

<sup>464</sup> On the contributions to the Singapore Institution in 1823, see: Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, *The Hikayat Abdullah: The Autobiography of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir (1797-1854)*, translated by A.H. Hill, p. 181, and the list of subscriptions in: Lady Raffles, *Memoir* (1830), Appendix pp. 85-86.

<sup>465</sup> C.B. Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, p. 131.

<sup>466</sup> Buckley, p. 139.



Cama & Company, a Parsi firm, founded an English-language school in Tanjong Pagar Road in June 1864. Most of the students in this school were Chinese.<sup>467</sup> Meanwhile, a prominent European merchant, James Guthrie, also sponsored a school in Tanjong Pagar in the 1860s; his school provided instruction in the Malay language for Malay and Chinese students.<sup>468</sup>

A group of Chinese elites, led by two young leaders, Dr. Lim Boon Keng and Song Ong Siang (who became Sir Ong Siang Song in 1936),<sup>469</sup> established the prestigious Singapore Chinese Girls' School in 1899.<sup>470</sup> In addition to Lim and Song, the members of the first committee included the Chinese Consul, Lew Yuk Lin, as well as Lim Keng Kuee, Khoo Seok Wan (son of Khoo Cheng Tiong), Tan Hup Seng (son of Tan Kim Tian), Ong Soon Tee (son of Ong Ewe Hai), Seah Pek Seah (son of Seah Eu Chin), and Tan Boo Liat (grandson of Tan Kim Ching and great-grandson of Tan Tock Seng). The school thus enjoyed the respectability and symbolic capital of association with some of the leading individuals among the Straits Chinese community, as well as some of the most prominent local dynasties, and the rising status of Lim and Song was no doubt enhanced by their role in the establishment of the school and their association with men who already enjoyed the high status of vast wealth and prestigious ancestry.

The Singapore Chinese Girls' School must have gained additional respectability from its location in localities which enjoyed respectable reputations. The new school began teaching its first batch of students in a house along Beach Road, in the neighbourhood of Raffles Institution, before moving into another building at the corner of

---

<sup>467</sup> Buckley, p. 711; Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 127.

<sup>468</sup> Buckley, p. 711; C. Bazell, "Education in Singapore," in Walter Makepeace et al., *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Volume One, p. 447.

<sup>469</sup> *Malaya Tribune*, 3 January 1936, p. 10, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0005931.

<sup>470</sup> Sir Ong Siang Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 305.

Hill Street and Coleman Street in 1909, not far from the headquarters of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Wee Ah Hood's old Chinese-style mansion. After sixteen years at its second location, the school moved again, this time to a large building in the very respectable neighbourhood between Emerald Hill Road and Cairnhill Road, just off Orchard Road. The school stayed there for the remainder of the colonial era and beyond, until it finally moved to a new campus in Dunearn Road in 1994.<sup>471</sup>

### **Chinese High School and Nanyang University**

Tan Kah Kee, a wealthy China-born Hokkien businessman, philanthropist, and Chinese patriot, was a great benefactor of education in Singapore, as well as in China. He helped establish the Tao Nan school in 1907, and after becoming the president of this school in 1911, he led the fundraising campaign which resulted in the opening of a very elegant and distinctive schoolhouse in Armenian Street, which still stands there today. By successfully demonstrating his leadership skills with regard to the establishment of the Tao Nan school, as well as in other educational endeavours, Tan Kah Kee doubtlessly enhanced his own standing as a rising leader within both the Hokkien community (the largest section of the Chinese people of Singapore), as well as within the wider local Chinese population, a topic which has been dealt with in detail in the excellent scholarly work of C.F. Yong. Tan Kah Kee's social ascendancy in Singapore was consolidated in part by the crowning achievements of his educational work: the establishment of the

---

<sup>471</sup> Low Yit Leng, "Uniform Success: Singapore's Top Schools," in: *Singapore Chronicles: A Special Commemorative History of Singapore Published by Singapore Tatler on the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Republic*, p. 196.

Singapore Chinese High School in 1918, and the founding of Amoy University in China in 1921.<sup>472</sup>

By accepting honours from the colonial state, in the form of appointments as a Justice of the Peace in 1918<sup>473</sup> and a Member of the Chinese Advisory Board in 1923,<sup>474</sup> Tan Kah Kee not only enjoyed the enhancement of his own prestige and status thanks to colonial honours, but he also contributed additional prestige and legitimation to the colonial state itself and its system of status symbols and honours, through his willingness to be associated with this system and this state. The public career of Tan Kah Kee illustrates how the flow of symbolic capital integrated the social structure, with prestige flowing from educational institutions to an individual leader, and from him to the colonial state and its system of status symbols, and from them back to the individual leader. Tan Kah Kee recognised the prestige and legitimacy of the system, and the system recognised his status and prestige as a leader, in a mutually-beneficial reciprocal exchange of symbolic capital.

Tan Kah Kee's post-war successor to the leadership of the Singapore Hokkien community, Tan Lark Sye, followed Tan Kah Kee's example in supporting Chinese education in Singapore, by assuming the leadership of the movement which established Nanyang University, or Nantah. Under Tan Lark Sye's leadership, the Singapore Hokkien Huay Kuan donated a magnificent five hundred acre site to serve as the campus for a new Chinese university in Singapore. Many people donated funds to the project, and a Tan Lark Sye officiated at the ceremonial inauguration of the construction project

---

<sup>472</sup> See: C.F. Yong, *Tan Kah-kee: The Making of an Overseas Chinese Legend*, especially pp. 78, 87-89, 96-105, 110, 132-133, and 351.

<sup>473</sup> C.F. Yong, *Tan Kah-kee*, pp. 120-121.

<sup>474</sup> C.F. Yong, *Tan Kah-kee*, p. 121.

on 26 July 1953. The focal point of the new campus was an administration and library building, constructed in a dignified and imposing style, which has been compared to an imperial Chinese palace. Classes started at Nantah on 15 March 1956, and on 30 March 1958, Governor Sir William Goode honoured the occasion by joining with Tan Lark Sye in presiding over the opening ceremony of Nanyang University.<sup>475</sup> The presence of Governor Goode, who represented Queen Elizabeth II, symbolised the recognition of the colonial state for the establishment of Nantah by Tan Lark Sye and other Chinese community leaders. By attending this event, the Governor confirmed the prestige and legitimacy of the colonial system. When Tan Lark Sye shared the public honour of opening the new university with the Governor, Tan implicitly acknowledged the legitimate authority of the colonial state and the worthiness of the imperial crown as a legitimate source of honour. Tan Lark Sye publicly demonstrated that a top Chinese community leader desired a colonial honour that was derived from the imperial crown just as much as his European fellow colonial elites.

The establishment of Nantah doubtlessly contributed greatly to the prestige and social standing of Tan Lark Sye, confirming his status as a Chinese community leader. His prominent role in a public ritual which paired him with the Governor as fellow co-stars in a performance in the theatre of prestige placed Tan, in some sense at least, on the same level as the Governor, and associated Tan with the imperial crown that was represented by the Governor. Tan and the Governor lent one another the symbolic benefit of their own sources of prestige and status, in a mutually beneficial exchange of symbolic capital. How much of Tan's prestige was due to the founding of Nanyang University, as opposed to how much was due to his other accomplishments in public

---

<sup>475</sup> Edwin Lee and Tan Tai Yong, *Beyond Degrees*, pp. 155-161.

service, would perhaps be difficult or even impossible to quantify. What is clear, though, is that Tan Lark Sye achieved a very significant degree of social standing by the end of the colonial era in 1959.<sup>476</sup>

### **Prestigious Gathering Places as Scenes of Prestige and Status Symbols**

The places where the elites chose to gather together, whether for associational purposes or for education, were important architectural status symbols. Elites supported the institutions behind these meeting-places, and shared in the enjoyment conspicuous consumption of them as symbols of elite status. The architectural dignity of the schools and private clubhouses of the elites paralleled the distinctiveness of their public meeting-places in the civic centre, as well as their sumptuous private residences. These symbols were highly visible, not only to the elites, but to the general public as well.

Asian and European elites shared the distinction of enjoying membership in prestigious clubs in Singapore, although they often seem to have preferred to belong to clubs established especially for their own racial or ethnic groups. Moreover, Asian elites in Singapore were often old boys of prestigious schools, such as Raffles Institution and the Anglo-Chinese School, just as their European fellow elites were often the old boys of prestigious schools in Britain.<sup>477</sup> Thus, Asian and European elites shared similar educational qualifications, as well as similar residential styles. The appropriation of the Singapore landscape by Asian and European elites, and their designation of certain places

---

<sup>476</sup> Regarding Tan Lark Sye and his standing in the Chinese-speaking community, see: Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* (1998), pp. 331-332 and 511-512.

<sup>477</sup> Regarding the club memberships and educational backgrounds of prominent Asians and Europeans in Singapore, see, for example, the biographical entries in: *Who's Who in Malaya 1939*.

as scenes of prestige, placed the leading Asians and Europeans alike at the same level of status, and on the same stage in the theatre of prestige.

### **Conspicuous Consumption and Display**

The economic and social success of Chinese and other Asian elites in colonial Singapore must be emphasised, in case there might be any misconception that only Europeans enjoyed wealth and privilege here in the colonial era.<sup>478</sup> The image of colonial society in the minds of Singaporeans and expatriates today may tend to privilege an awareness of the lifestyles, clubs, and mansions of the European colonial elites, while perhaps overlooking the wealth of the Chinese and other Asian colonial elites. This might lead to a mistaken view or social memory of the colonial past: that the Europeans possessed all of the wealth and influence, while the Chinese and other Asians were all impoverished labourers. This was clearly not the case.

While it is true that many Asian labourers did live in poverty in colonial Singapore (as, indeed, many *ang mohs* lived in poverty in Europe and the United States at that time), a reading of first-hand descriptions of Singapore written in the colonial era leads to the conclusion that the richest people in colonial Singapore were actually Chinese and other Asians,<sup>479</sup> and that the well-to-do Asians outnumbered their European

---

<sup>478</sup> For suggestions that such misconceptions might exist, see: Chan Kwok Bun and Claire Chiang See Ngoh, *Stepping Out: The Making of Chinese Entrepreneurs*, pp. 190 and 298; Norman Edwards, "The Colonial Suburb: Public Space as Private Space," in: Chua Beng-Huat and Norman Edwards, editors, *Public Space: Design, Use and Management*, pp. 36-39.

<sup>479</sup> Regarding accounts of the wealthy Chinese and other Asians, see: Minute by Governor Robert Fullerton, dated 24<sup>th</sup> August 1829, published as extract number 154 in: C.D. Cowan, editor, "Early Penang & the Rise of Singapore 1805-1832: Documents from the manuscript records of the East India Company..." in the *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. XXIII, Pt. II, March 1950, p. 192 (I am grateful to Clement Liew for kindly bringing this extract to my attention); see also: *Singapore Chronicle*, 1 July 1830, p. 3, NUS Central Library microfilm reel R0009222; John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p. 135; Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago*, pp. 32 and 33; John Thomson, *The Straits of Malacca*, p. 64; Isabella L. Bird, *The Golden Chersonese and the Way Thither*, pp. 115 and 116; Sir Frederick A. Weld, "The Straits Settlements and British Malaya," in: Paul H. Kratoska, editor, *Honourable Intentions*, p. 48; *Straits Times* 14 January 1885, p. 2, and 16 May 1885, p. 2, NUS

fellow elites here.<sup>480</sup> This is an important fact, because it is necessary in order to appreciate the extent to which the colonial system in Singapore and its Malayan hinterland was actually an endeavour of Asian elites at least as much as it was a project of European elites, and this conclusion in turn leads to an appreciation of the importance of the social connections between Asian and European elites to the nature and development of the colonial system. Moreover, the similarities in the opulent lifestyles of Asian and European elites helped to reduce the social distance between them, and to promote their social integration in the cosmopolitan centre of this colonial society.<sup>481</sup>

The high degree of success achieved by Asian elites within the colonial system – in terms of their acquisition of both wealth and status symbols – was clearly displayed in public for all to see. The possession and display of status symbols by Asian colonial elites strongly suggested that most of the prestigious people in colonial Singapore were Asians, and that most of these Asian elites were Chinese – despite the fact that this was supposedly a *European* colonial port. When Rowland Allen, a British lawyer, arrived in Singapore in 1895, he noted in his diary that the finest horses and carriages belonged to

---

Central Library microfilm reel R0016433; T.J. Keaughran, *Picturesque and Busy Singapore*, Singapore National Library microfilm NL 5829, p. 19; Henry Norman, *The Peoples and Politics of The Far East*, pp. 41-42; John Dill Ross, *The Capital of a Little Empire*, National Library of Singapore Microfilm reel NL 5829, p. 69; Arnold Wright and Thomas H. Reid, *The Malay Peninsula: A Record of British Progress in the Middle East*, pp. 221 and 227; W. Feldwick, editor-in-chief, *Present Day Impressions of the Far East and Prominent and Progressive Chinese at Home and Abroad*, p. 837; Rev. W.T. Cherry, *Geography of British Malaya and the Malay Archipelago*, p. 11; Charlotte Cameron, *Wanderings in South-Eastern Seas*, pp. 32-34 and 46; J.E. Nathan, *The Census of British Malaya ... 1921*, p. 91, and: C.A. Vlieland, *British Malaya ... A Report on the 1931 Census*, p. 87 (regarding wealthy Arabs and Jews); Margaret C. Wilson, *Malaya: The Land of Enchantment*, p. 105; John H. MacCallum Scott, *Eastern Journey*, pp. 17-18; René Onraet, *Singapore – A Police Background*, p. 12; Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911*, p. 145; and: C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*, pp. 38-40 and 113.

<sup>480</sup> Regarding the relative wealth of the richest Asians and Europeans in colonial Singapore, see: C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988*, pp. 39-40 and 112-113; and: Carl A. Trocki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control*, p. 104.

<sup>481</sup> W. Lloyd Warner et al., *Social Class in America*, pp. 10, 21, and 23.

the wealthy Chinese.<sup>482</sup> The splendid equipages of local Asian elites were on public display in the streets of Singapore in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Another European who visited Singapore around the same time claimed that the wealthy Chinese in Singapore employed European coachmen to drive their carriages.<sup>483</sup>

With their imposing mansions and expensive carriages, the wealthy Chinese presented a conspicuous image of success and opulence that was apparent to European visitors,<sup>484</sup> as well as to the Asian and European inhabitants of this island. By the second decade of the twentieth century, the Chinese business elites rivalled their European fellow elites in the ownership of a new type of status symbol: the automobile,<sup>485</sup> an invention which created an enormous demand for Malayan rubber, especially in the American market,<sup>486</sup> this demand further enriched many Chinese capitalists here. By the early 1920s, well-to-do Chinese could be seen cruising through the Singapore Botanic Gardens in their cars in the evenings.<sup>487</sup> When Governor Sir Laurence Guillemard hosted a dinner at Government House in 1921, one of his Chinese guests arrived in a Rolls-

---

<sup>482</sup> Rowland Allen's 1895 diary, quoted in: Julian Davison, *Allen & Gledhill Centenary*, p. 7.

<sup>483</sup> Henry Norman, *The Peoples and Politics of The Far East*, p. 42; this point was disputed by John Dill Ross, *The Capital of a Little Empire: A Descriptive Study of a British Crown Colony in the Far East* (1898), p. 69. For other mentions of the fine carriages owned by wealthy Chinese, see: Ross, p. 32; *Straits Times*, 29 January 1876, p. 2, R0016425; John Thomson, *The Straits of Malacca Indo-China and China or Ten Years' Travels, Adventures and Residence Abroad* (1875), p. 57; T.J. Keaughran, *Picturesque and Busy Singapore* (1887), p. 19; and: Rev. J.A. Bethune Cook, *Sunny Singapore: An Account of the Place and its People, with a Sketch of the Results of Missionary Work*, Second Edition (1907), p. 23. See also the accounts of some of the European visitors to Singapore in John Bastin's *Travellers' Singapore: An Anthology*, namely: Frederick William Burbidge (1877), p. 121; William T. Hornaday (1878), p. 125; Mary Macfarlane Park (1901), p. 168; and Ethel Colquhoun (1901), p. 171.

<sup>484</sup> Compare this with the description of the mansions of wealthy Arabs and Chinese in the Dutch East Indies, in: J. Macmillan Brown, *The Dutch East: Sketches and Pictures* (1914), pp. 151-152.

<sup>485</sup> Arnold Wright and Thomas H. Reid, *The Malay Peninsula* (1912), p. 221; Arnold Wright and H.A. Cartwright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya* (1908), p. 702; Richard Curle, *Into the East* (1923), pp. 129-130. See also: C.F. Yong, *Tan Kah-kee*, p. 86, and: Roxana Waterson, "Gathering Speed: Transport and the Pace of Life," in: Chan Kwok Bun and Tong Chee Kiong, editors, *Past Times: A Social History of Singapore*, pp. 116-117; note the photographs of Chinese and Arab elites in their fine automobiles on pp. 116 and 117.

<sup>486</sup> Li Dun Jen, *British Malaya: An Economic Analysis*, p. 88.

<sup>487</sup> Richard Curle, *Into the East: Notes on Burma and Malaya* (1923), pp. 129-130.



## *Scenes of Prestige*

Royce, which impressed a British peer, Alfred Viscount Northcliffe, who was also dining at Government House that evening; Lord Northcliffe was impressed as well by the large amount of diamond jewellery worn by the Chinese lady guests at this dinner.<sup>488</sup>

Considering the unmistakable impression of economic success and status achievement made by these wealthy Chinese capitalists, as well as by other Asian elites in colonial Singapore, through their conspicuous display of status symbols which were clearly visible in their time, it would be a mistake for historical accounts to portray these elites as having been somehow *subjugated* or *colonised* people, or as *victims* of the colonial system here. Likewise, to view them as merely subalterns, middlemen, or compradores (in the pejorative sense of this term)<sup>489</sup> would be a gross underestimation of their importance within the colonial system. The Asian business elites managed to achieve a remarkable degree of success within this colonial system, in both economic and symbolic terms; their success suggests that they did not experience any great difficulty in adapting to this system or making it work for themselves. It would seem that they did not find the colonial setting to be uncongenial or bewildering;<sup>490</sup> on the contrary, these highly resourceful Asian entrepreneurs mastered the rules of the game, so to speak, of the colonial system, and played to win – and in consequence they achieved the highest levels of wealth and prestige. The sumptuous mansions and luxurious lifestyles of the Asian business elites – the obvious signs of their impressive success – were the envy of

---

<sup>488</sup> See Lord Northcliffe's account of the dinner at Government House in Singapore in 1921, in: Alfred Viscount Northcliffe, *My Journey Round the World (16 July 1921 – 26 Feb. 1922)*, p. 163. This account is quoted in John Bastin's *Travellers' Singapore: An Anthology*, p. 195.

<sup>489</sup> Regarding the pejorative sense attached to the term *compradore*, see: Rajat Kanta Ray, "Asian Capital in the Age of European Domination: The Rise of the Bazaar, 1800-1914," *Modern Asian Studies*, Volume 29, Number 3 (July 1995), pp. 485 and 553.

<sup>490</sup> See: John M. Carroll, *Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong*, pp. 4, 13, and 59.

European visitors to colonial Singapore.<sup>491</sup> The wealth and status symbols amassed by these Asian business elites confirmed their identity as *some* of the chief beneficiaries – perhaps even *the* chief beneficiaries – of this colonial system, among the members of the multiracial elite class resident in this Settlement. The opulent lifestyles of these Asian elites bore no resemblance whatsoever to the harsh existence of the mass of Asian labourers, the rickshaw pullers and dock workers; for the Asian business elites, colonial Singapore was a paradise, and they were stakeholders in the colonial system at least as much as their European fellow elites.

The privileged lifestyles of the leading Asians and Europeans here promoted their mutual recognition of their shared elite status and their location together in the same region of social space, at the centre of the local colonial society (such as the Chinese with a Rolls-Royce who attended a dinner at Government House in 1921, which greatly impressed Lord Northcliffe),<sup>492</sup> providing them with the social context for their continued cooperative interaction and networking, which sustained the system and their own privileged position. The conspicuousness of their pecuniary equivalence, or even superiority to their Western fellow elites, was conducive to their social proximity and integration; the wealth of the leading Asian and European elites not only made them fellow members of the same *economic* class, but also fostered their inclusion in the same *social* class by helping to place them in the same multiracial elite gatherings, such as

---

<sup>491</sup> See: Arnold Wright and Thomas H. Reid, *The Malay Peninsula* (1912), pp. 221 and 227; Charlotte Cameron, *Wanderings in South-Eastern Seas* (1924), pp. 32-34 and 46; Margaret C. Wilson, *Malaya: The Land of Enchantment* (1937?), pp. 105 and 112; John H. MacCallum Scott, *Eastern Journey* (1939), pp. 17-18. See also the accounts of some of the European visitors to Singapore in John Bastin's *Travellers' Singapore: An Anthology*, namely: Cuthbert Collingwood (1866-7), p. 106; William T. Hornaday (1878), p. 125; Fred Riley (1899), p. 160; Ethel Colquhoun (1901), p. 171; and Lord Northcliffe (1921), pp. 193 and 195.

<sup>492</sup> See Lord Northcliffe's account of this dinner in 1921, in: Alfred Viscount Northcliffe, *My Journey Round the World (16 July 1921 – 26 Feb. 1922)*, p. 163. This account is quoted in John Bastin's *Travellers' Singapore: An Anthology*, p. 195.

### *Scenes of Prestige*

dinners at Government House, where they could find opportunities to build acquaintanceships, form social connections, and develop a shared sense of status identity as fellow members of the multiracial elite class.

The visible expressions of the economic success of Asian elites – their conspicuously opulent lifestyles and their possession of status symbols, such as imposing mansions, fine carriages, and splendid Rolls-Royce cars – were clear signs of their mastery of the rules of the game in the colonial system, and their location in the centre of the colonial society and the core of the colonial system, along with their European fellow elites. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, these expressions of success contributed to the social distinction of these elites, which fostered the continuity of their practices of forming social ties and engaging in cooperative interaction with one another and with their European fellow elites, by facilitating their mutual recognition and acceptance of elite status, reducing the social distance between them and locating them in the same elite locality within the colonial social space. We can imagine the opulent and luxury lifestyles enjoyed by these wealthy Asians in their sumptuous mansions – the fruits of their successful participation and active cooperation in the colonial system, of which they were leading stakeholders and beneficiaries. Their distinctive lifestyles and mansions set them apart from the general public and gave Asian and European elites a sense of shared elite status and distinction, despite their different cultural backgrounds.

The conspicuous expressions of Asian elite distinction were not only manifestations of their centrality in the colonial society, but also functional components in the continued operation of this system, this joint enterprise of Asian and European elites. While the central role of European elites in the colonial system really goes without

### *Scenes of Prestige*

saying, as it is a commonplace in accounts of the colonial era, both contemporary and post-colonial, the same cannot be said of the no less important role of Asian elites in the colonial enterprise, which has received much less attention, together with the fact that the ethnically diverse population of a colonial society could integrate at the summit level and thereby derive a degree of unity and centred-ness, contrary to the Furnivallian notion of the ethnically compartmentalised plural colonial society. The fact that the colonial society here was one socially-centred society with interethnic and interracial linkages at the elite level, as well as the fact that Asian elites played a central role in the colonial system and its society, are important facts in social history which deserve more attention. An appreciation of elite-level interracial social integration may lead not only to a better understanding of the plural colonial society, but also of colonialism itself, as a joint enterprise or partnership of cooperating Asian and European colonial elites.

The remarkable success of Asian elites within the colonial system, their successful acquisition of social, economic, and symbolic rewards, and their close cooperation and social integration with their European fellow elites in the centre of the local colonial society, were enduring themes of the colonial era in Singapore – themes which constituted much of the continuity of the social history of this place. An appreciation of these themes requires a recognition of facts which were quite obvious even to casual observers in the colonial era itself, though much less obvious – if highlighted at all – in more recent scholarly and popular accounts of the colonial era, in much the same way that the opulence of wealthy Asian elites was obvious and remarkable to visitors to colonial Singapore. Asian elites were at the centre of colonial Singapore, economically, socially, and symbolic, throughout the colonial era, together

## *Scenes of Prestige*

with their Western fellow elites and partners. These themes, which were related to the central role and achievements of Asian elites in colonial Singapore, were reinforced and, in large part, made possible by, the cooperation of Asian and European elites in the creation, exchange, and enjoyment of forms of symbolic capital, which resulted in – as well as resulted from – the social integration of this racially and ethnically diverse community of prestige. Their shared membership in this elite class, and their shared location in the centre of the colonial society, was represented and reinforced in the built environment by their possession of the most massive status symbols on the island: their meeting places, their ritual spaces, and their homes.

### **Concluding Remarks**

There was a paradoxical dimension in the creation of the settings and performances of the theatre of prestige: these simultaneously set the elites apart from the masses, and yet also put elites of different races together in a relationship in which they could see each other as equals, in terms of enjoying approximately equal status with one another. This location in close social status proximity within one another, in the same region of social space, was a situation within which they could engage in the reciprocal social exchange of symbolic capital with one another, since relative social equality is conducive to social exchange processes: people can make social exchanges more easily with other people with whom they are roughly equal in status.<sup>493</sup> It is only natural for an individual to value the honours and praise received from a person of equal status more than honours received from someone of inferior status; indeed, this may be one explanation why elites in some countries support monarchs who have no real political

---

<sup>493</sup> Peter P. Ekeh, *Social Exchange Theory: The Two Traditions*, pp. 48-49 and 57.

### *Scenes of Prestige*

power, since elites may feel that they need a monarch to serve as a high-status person who can confer high-status honours. Even when local elites honoured especially exalted personages or institutions, such as the Crown and the Empire, they were thereby putting themselves into the same category of elite status as their fellow local elites of various races – and, in a sense, with their fellow elites elsewhere throughout the Empire. This sense of shared elite status and reputation likely helped provide a social environment that was conducive to business, by promoting acquaintanceships, the valuing of mutually-recognised reputations, and trustworthiness.<sup>494</sup>

Public buildings and spaces, as well as private mansions, served as important status symbols of the multiracial elite class of colonial Singapore, and the enjoyment or consumption of these symbols by Asian and European colonial elites contributed to the representation and social integration of the elite class. The civic centre and the suburban mansions provided appropriately dignified settings or scenes of prestige within which elites could engage in social interaction and produce collective representations of their class as a prestigious and cohesive community of shared high social status, despite their lack of a shared cultural identity. Private mansions, public buildings, and ceremonial spaces were some of the most important symbols of the elite class; Asian and Western elites invested these symbols with symbolic capital that was reinforced and publicised over time by social rituals, conspicuous display, and publications in the print media. Their ownership of these stages in the theatre of prestige proclaimed their possession of the summit of the colonial society and, indeed, their share in the ownership of the colonial system itself. The location of their social activities and prestigious rituals – their

---

<sup>494</sup> Thomas Menkhoff, *Trade Routes, Trust and Trading Networks – Chinese Small Enterprises in Singapore*, pp. 131-147.

## *Scenes of Prestige*

performances in the theatre of prestige – within the privileged localities and scenes of the urban and suburban colonial cityscape, as well as within the centre of the colonial society, of which they were constantly reminded by the dignity of the distinctive appearance of these buildings, likely gave them a shared sense of elite class identity, which may have been at least as important to them as their separate racial and cultural identities.

By creating and occupying these settings, the leading Asians and Europeans claimed the most desirable and esteemed localities as their own – which reinforced their claim to the centre of the society itself – and gave them a sense of shared social memory and history as a class.<sup>495</sup> Thus, their interactions and activities gave the elites not only a sense of shared importance, institutions, rituals, and geographical setting in the *present tense* in their own times, but also a shared heritage of the same institutions, rituals, and geographical settings in the *past* that they celebrated. Within the scenes of prestige, Asian and European elites created new local traditions of institutionalised patterns of social interaction among members of the cosmopolitan elite class, and these new traditions<sup>496</sup> carried the social reality<sup>497</sup> of their community of prestige into the future.<sup>498</sup> Their shared experience of the past, as well as their communion of status in the present, helped link the leading Asians and Europeans together in spite of their cultural differences, positioning them in close proximity within social space, where they could

---

<sup>495</sup> See: Neil Leach, “Belonging: Towards a Theory of Identification with Space,” in: Jean Hillier and Emma Rooksby, editors, *Habitus: A Sense of Place*, pp. 285-286.

<sup>496</sup> See: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, editors, *The Invention of Tradition*.

<sup>497</sup> Regarding the concept of *social reality*, see: Charles Horton Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order*, Revised Edition 1922, pp. 95 and 119-124.

<sup>498</sup> On the social reality of classes and groups, see: Pierre Bourdieu, “Social Space and Symbolic Power,” in: Donald McQuarrie, ed., *Readings in Contemporary Sociological Theory*, pp. 327 and 333-334; Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, Chapter 9, p. 135; and: Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, p. 53.

### *Scenes of Prestige*

cultivate their social capital through the exchange and communion of symbolic capital, socially integrating their community of prestige.

The reality of the inclusion of elite Asians in the central social institutions, rituals, and symbolic system of the colonial society, as revealed in this study, stands in sharp contrast to the conventional Furnivallian image of the racially-compartmentalised plural colonial society. An exploration of the colonial built environment as a collection of both artefacts and instruments of the interactions and representations of Asian and European elites suggests that the concept of the plural colonial society needs to be taken beyond the Furnivallian definition – it needs to be redefined to take into account the fact that Asians and Europeans in the colonial context interacted in the social and symbolic realms as well as in the economic realm, at least at the elite level. The history of the development of the prestigious public and commercial buildings, public spaces, and suburban residential localities, reveals a record of the success of Asian elites within the colonial system. Asian and European elites invested symbolic meaning into all of the scenes of prestige – public buildings and spaces, mansions and clubhouses, sports fields and schools – consecrating them as important status symbols. The possession and control of these status symbols by Asian and European elites alike proclaimed their fellow membership in *their* elite class, their status as fellow elites in *their* community of prestige at the centre of *their* colonial society. They recognised one another's status, and enjoyed the consumption of these symbols together; and the enjoyment of participation in the system of status symbols acted as a social magnet, bringing these elites together in the communion of prestige.